
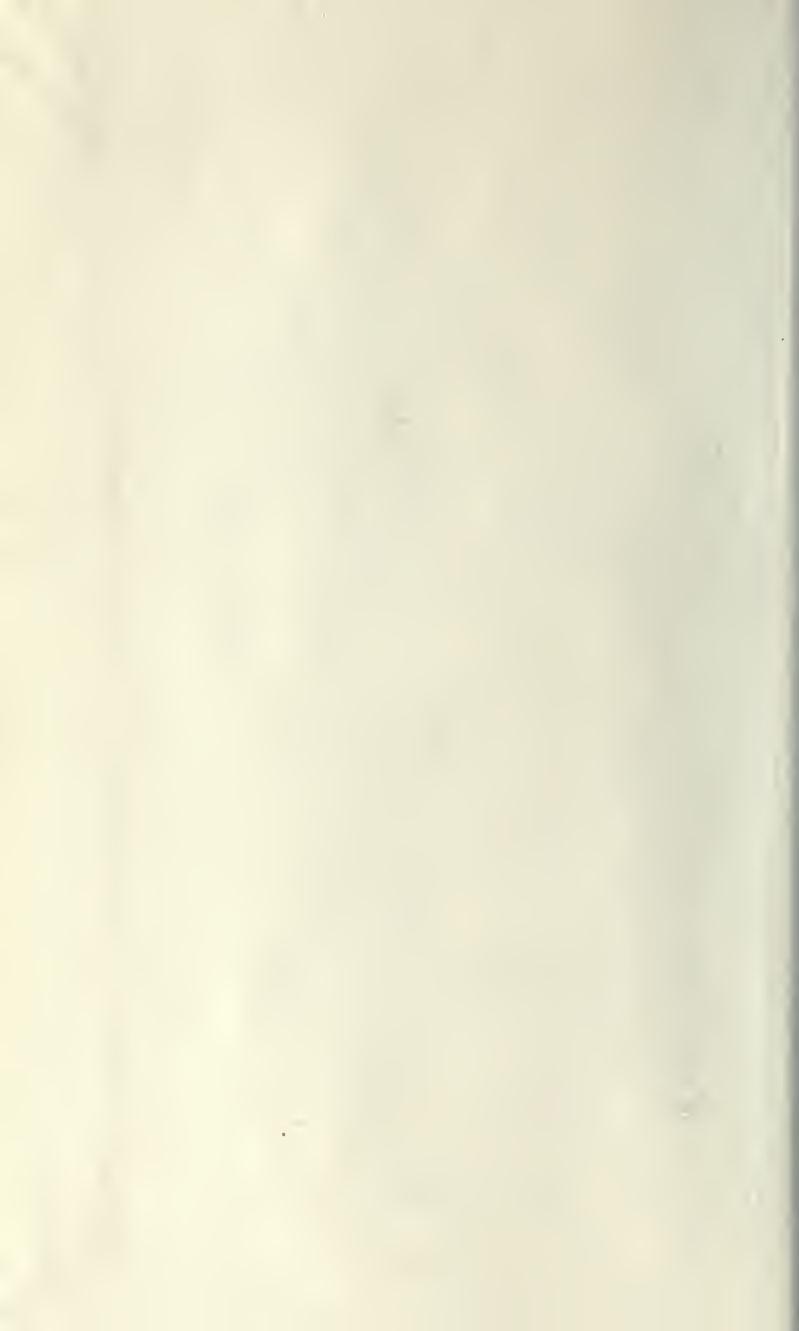


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Cariboo Road

By the same author:

THE GREAT DIVIDE

THE FUR MASTERS

THREE CAME TO VILLE MARIE

CARIBOO ROAD

by

ALAN SULLIVAN



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Contents

Chapter	Page
1. BOUND FOR THE CARIBOO Concerning the Bowers family, Marta Zeiss, and Mr. Lemuel Flint.	1
2. IN THE FRASER CANYON Mr. Harper of England, camels in the Fraser Can- yon, Sam Hawkins, and Judge Begbie.	32
3. THE GOLDEN CARIBOO Mr. Johnny Knott and his luxury claim—the Red Jacket.	62
4. THE JUDGE TAKES A CHANCE Ma Bowers visits Sophy Cameron, then meets a ghost.	82
5. A PARTNERSHIP OFFER	107
6. BILL BARKER STRIKES IT	114
7. THE PASSING OF SOPHY CAMERON	126
8. MR. FLINT BECOMES AN ALTRUIST	138
9. EXCITEMENT ON THE RED JACKET	156
10. JUDGE BEGBIE AMONGST HIS FRIENDS	169
11. A CHANCE ENCOUNTER	182
12. WINTER COMES TO THE CARIBOO	191
13. THE READING PARTY Cameron strikes it, and Sophy goes out.	204
14. SOME SECRET THOUGHTS OF LEMUEL FLINT	217
15. ON THE MAKING OF ROADS AND COUNTRIES	226
16. SPRING COMES TO THE CARIBOO	231
17. THE CUNNINGHAM ROBBERY Mr. Lemuel Flint, and Mr. Michael Trupp.	242
18. MR. FLINT GOES ON A MANHUNT	262
19. RESCUE AND DISCOVERY ON POORMAN'S CREEK	288
20. THE REBIRTH OF LEMUEL FLINT	301

1

Bound for the Cariboo

ON a morning in May, 1862, a short, plump woman with a short, straight nose, blue eyes and small, square wrists sat on a barrow in her vegetable garden on Telegraph Hill in the State of California; the family was pulling up stakes for Canada and the golden Cariboo, and when, wondered Ma Bowers, would she again see Frisco Bay.

For some moments she remained thus perched, silent, thoughtful, so motionless that her buxom figure might have been raised amongst the pale green regiments of young cabbages that were her special pride; she did not turn when her husband staggered from the house beneath a gigantic, tightly roped bundle; she gave no heed when Mary, their adopted daughter, closed the last window in the last empty room, locked the front door and stood waiting, key in hand. These two glanced at her, at each other, said nothing.

Far below them a toy steamer was lying against the long timber wharf of Stanleytown; from it there sprang a jet of steam; four seconds later echoed a faint, throaty bellow, and at this Ma Bowers straightened up, brushed her skirts with a characteristic gesture, returned to earth.

"That's the lot, Dan?" her voice was brisk.

Mr. Bowers wiped a glistening forehead. "Yes, mother."

"All those windows good and tight, Mary?"

"Yes, Ma, every one; I filled the water barrel, and there's kindling right by the stove. What about this key?"

"I told Mrs. Clancy she'd find it under the doorstep. What's troubling you, Dan?"

He had heaved the bundle into a one-horse wagon; he was staring at the steamer, then, turning, fixed on the house with an odd expression, chin a little lifted, lips pushed out as though something disconcerting had just occurred to him; now he swerved, met his wife's clear, blue eyes, squared his shoulders, gave his head a toss.

"Just nothing—nothing at all; all loaded up. Better get in mother, there isn't too much time."

"I'm walking."

"No, you'd better ride; plenty of room—you didn't get much sleep last night, none of us did. There's walking enough before we hit the Cariboo."

"I'm walking, Dan," she repeated. "You two push on an' get the stuff loaded before it's crowded out. I'll take that key, daughter."

"Sure," he said hastily, "that's all right—come on Mary."

She watched them dwindle downhill, sitting close; the girl in her new bombazine and new hat trimmed with shiny strawberries and glossy leaves, just arrived from England by way of Cape Horn. The cart rattle died out. All quiet now up here on Telegraph Hill, and she lifted her gaze over the rambling wooden streets of Stanleytown, over the raking black funnel of the Brother Jonathan, over the shining Bay to the low hills of Alameda. There was Alcatraz Island, there the Golden Gate, there the view she loved best. Then slowly, she unlocked a familiar door and went back into the house; she wanted to be quite alone, just for a little while.

In their own room she halted; the air was full of sunlight, tiny motes from Mary's dusting still swam in a sparkling haze. The only thing left was a bed frame with a straw mattress; hers and Dan's, now the Clancys'. Tim and Molly would sleep there tonight. There was a sag in the mattress because she and Dan always lay close till the sun waked them as it climbed over the Alameda hills. Tomorrow it would wake the Clancys.

Suddenly she made a choky sound, and plunged on her knees.

"Oh God," she prayed, face pressed into the straw, "I hope I did right over this business; I've always tried to; I didn't want to quit Ohio for a covered wagon, and You were right there in the midst of us the day the Navajos went for the caravan. You know that, God. I didn't want to live on the Sacramento, but Dan was all for it; and I did want to stay right here on Telegraph Hill with my garden, and rest once in a while, for, Oh God! sometimes I get kind of tired. And when Dan got the Cariboo fever I caved right in like I did before, but I reckoned it's up to a woman to follow her man because maybe that's what she's made for. And, God, You know Dan needs all the help he can get from us both if this Cariboo country isn't what he makes out, and we haven't any home now, and You only know what's in front of us, so help me see this thing through, and not think too much about Telegraph Hill, and help Mary get a husband who'll look after her proper for that's important. So into Thy hand I commend us all, and Thy will be done."

She felt better after this, felt as though she'd made a sort of private partnership, so she jammed down her small, black bonnet against the tight bun of thick brown hair, retied the strings, took one last survey of what till yesterday had been home. Then she put the key under the front doorstep, and started downhill for Stanleytown, head up, the sun in her face.

She had never let Mary go there alone if she could stop it. At night one marked straggling lines of light criss-crossing the wickedest town on earth, gold drunk, gold crazy; one caught the intensified glare of the big saloons and dance halls, heard the scrape of fiddles, shouts, laughter, often the staccato bark of derringers, but, somehow, she had managed to shut all that out of their lives. They were safe up here. Dan didn't gamble, seldom took a drink, but in the

Cariboo Road

middle of his gardening a touch of the old fever would return; he'd strike his spade deep, lean on it, look wistful, clear his throat, and say:

"Y'know, mother, it seems a shame; it's right there where you can pick it up easy as shelling peas; fellow showed me some yesterday the size of buckwheat—said it laid right on the surface, and——" then his voice would trail out, he'd avoid her eyes, fall to digging again.

So it went with the flame growing and growing within him, but never a word from her, till one day he came up hill with an odd light in eyes, and spilled into a saucer his takings for produce—a few dull yellow pellets much like split peas.

"Cariboo stuff," said he, licking his lips. "Got it off a digger just back from Canada."

That was a week ago. Now they had sold out!

* * *

Nearing the waterfront, Ma caught an increasing clamour; the crowd was thicker here, and excitement reached fever pitch when a dozen Bactrian camels were herded down Pacific Street from the highboarded pen where they had been enclosed for weeks past. She had never really seen them—the Syndicate charged fifty cents for that. Today the view of the monstrous, hairy bodies filled her with incredulity.

"Come on, mother, come on! You'll see enough of 'em before we're through."

"But, Dan, I——"

"No time to waste here, I tell you," his voice squeaked impatiently.

"Just a minute—what are they for anyway?"

"Freighting into the Cariboo."

"But I thought——"

"Look here, we've got to make a push; there's a hundred more on that boat right now than her license calls for—

she's jammed full, I tell you—lots of time when we get started!" He dragged her along, his face glowing; he looked happier, younger than in years past, and for a moment she was consoled.

"Got that money safe?"

"Sure," he slapped his thigh.

"Better let me carry it inside my blouse."

"Don't you worry, mother," he liked the feel of a fat wad against his leg "what kept you—thought you were never coming!"

"I was—was just having a look round. Where's daughter?"

"Aboard, watching our stuff, it needs watching—now hang onto my coat."

He forged ahead till, buffeted, breathless, she stood beside Mary. They surveyed the horde now jammed at the *Brother Jonathan's* black side. Men of all nations, all colours; miners, prospectors, merchants, pedlars, Mexicans, Chinamen, gamblers, saloon keepers from haunts like the *Bella Coola* and *Hell's Kitchen*—all had come to speed the parting Argonauts. Mary was excited, her dark eyes danced, but the older woman could still see the house with its fringe of peach trees. Already it looked far away, and she felt a little sick.

"What's the matter, Ma?"

"Nothing, daughter, nothing. Now there's to be no talk on this boat from you to man or women, especially woman, till I say it's all right. You'll watch out for her, Dan?"

"Sure, I will."

"Promise, daughter?"

"Why, yes, but I can take care of myself."

"Maybe, but you ain't had to do that yet." Ma spoke testily; never had she felt so upset, so uprooted, so responsible for a man of forty who would never grow up, and a girl of nineteen already hard to handle, likely to be harder.

Cariboo Road

"I've got my hands full," she added, "and don't you make 'em spill over."

"That's a fact," put in Dan, "that's certainly a fact; your Ma's tired, Mary, plum tired out, so you help her all you can—we wouldn't be here if it weren't for her."

"I will, Ma, I will; don't you worry."

"That's a good girl. Gosh! You'd think those camels had no feelings the way they're treated. You going to stand for that, Dan?"

"I guess their skin's pretty thick."

"Ma, there's Mrs. Clancy!"

A large bareheaded woman had worked her way forward, planted herself solidly against a post, stood smiling up at them.

"Is it safe aboard ye are with nothing broke?"

"Thanks to Dan," nodded Ma, smiling back.

"Any breath left in yez at all?"

"Not much. How did you get here?"

"Me nature an' me elbows did it: Tim wud be here too seeing yez off, but he's away down the Bay for a load of wood. Did ye see thim camels?"

"Couldn't miss 'em," laughed Dan.

"It's meself that'll be dreaming about 'em this very night. I was thinking of me slavin' in the truck garden with you ridin' wan ev them up to a fine house on Knob Hill after ye sthruck it rich."

Ma tried to seem gay, but her heart lay heavy.

"It's not that ye'll be lacking for company," continued the other woman, her hands on her hips. "Glory be to God! but the ship is bursting."

"No, Molly, lots of company: you'll find the key under the doorstep as I told you, and the young carrots need weed-ing right away, and there's a packet of lettuce seeds in the shed, and—and tell Tim we're wishing you all the luck in the world."

Mrs. Clancy grinned at her. "It isn't us that'll ever keep

the garden like you did, but you'll be having a letter about it soon—Mrs. Dan Bowers—the Cariboo—Canada—that's what you said?"

"That's right: we'll be glad to hear, with letters so scarce."

Now set up a little pause while they regarded each other in silence, there being so much in their hearts for which there was no present speech but they would think of later on, wishing they had said it, and the grey Irish eyes of Molly Clancy signalled, "It's the fine woman ye are, and it's the vagarious husband ye've got on your hands, to say nothing of a daughter that needs watching in these days, and it's meself that knows ye hate to go at all, and why ye go, and I'm thinking ye're crazy to go anyway, but with us women it's often like that." And Ma got it all, every dumb word of it.

Then of a sudden Mrs. Clancy said:—

"God help us, but I forgot entirely: Tim told me if you found no dust at all up there, if it was all talk and noise about thim nuggets, and things wasn't so good, the three of yez must come straight back home. The Clancys, says he, has always room for the Bowers."

"No, Molly, we won't forget," said Ma chokily.

"Well, it's meself that's desthroyed to see yez going. She's moving, Mrs. Bowers, she's moving!"

From the tall stack belched an inky cloud with a baptism of soot, a slow thrashing sound set up amidships, the vessel quivered slightly, her whistle gave one ultimate wheeze, slowly a space widened at the logribbed front of the wharf: soon the sea of shoreward faces merged into a muddy smudge in which Mrs. Clancy was lost, the cheering dwindled, a muffled thunder rose under the domelike paddle boxes, and the *Brother Jonathan* listing sharply, loaded far beyond any margin of safety, set her sleek bows for the Golden Gate.

Cariboo Road

The steamer was built for duty along Frisco Bay and up the quiet waters of the Sacramento. She was flatbottomed and drew eight feet, but when that spring the northward rush set full tide for the new goldfields the Argonauts recked little what carried them if only they reached Canada. Top prices were paid for passage, and four thousand men jumped ashore every week at Yale on the Lower Fraser.

It took hours before any sort of order was established, so cluttered was she with dunnage, tools, boxes, bundles and sacks, and when she rolled one moved about with hazard. Off Point Reyes she caught the slow clocklike surge of the Pacific. There one first felt her climbing the silky swells, sliding casually to the next valley while her paddlewheels, unequally submerged, shook her from stem to stern; but the sun shone, weather promised fair, and were they not all bound for the golden north?

The camels had been marooned in a breasthigh barricade of compressed hay, over which they leered with oriental contempt; fifty feet away, as far as could be managed, were tethered a dozen mules. The betting was on the mules. The deck was much cut up by companionways, ventilators, bridge, engine-room skylights; but slowly a sort of order came out of its confusion and there emerged individual islands of possessions, each guarded by one of the owners.

Dan, circulating on deck, had joined a group at the stern to examine a new map of the Fraser, whereat Mary seized a moment of freedom. She was aware of a new gown, new hat; she was looking her best, and knew it. She had a smooth, clear skin, short upper lip, a rather mutinous lower one; her eyes sparkled, cheeks glowed: here she was with four hundred men and not a single one to talk to, so presently she joined the circle round the camels. An Argonaut stepped aside, another, and she found herself in the front rank. She pulled a handful of hay, held it out.

Instantly a long neck swayed towards her, hairy ears cocked; the wicked eyes had a wild glint, and of a sudden

a battery of large, square, yellow teeth clamped over the scarlet berries in her hat—they vanished. She felt a tug, her scalp seemed to lift, to part from her; she gave a scream that was drowned in a gale of laughter while a heave of the *Brother Jonathan* sent her shamed and gasping to the rail.

"That was just too bad, let me fix it for you."

It was a girl she had not seen before, older than herself, with strong shoulders, flaxen hair flattened in a silk scarf tied under her chin; a silk blouse, white wool stockings and bright red shoes. Her large, round, china-blue eyes were wide with a look that told nothing; her skin was like cream. Over the cream she had laid a dusting of scented powder; over the powder two scarlet spots glowed like gouts of blood.

Mary looked at her mistily, vaguely, and drew back.

"No—no thanks—I'm all right," she reached for the rail.

"But your head's bleeding right now: bit dizzy, ain't you?"

Mary nodded, eyes on the red shoes; she wanted to get away, but couldn't trust her legs. Her head swam, the ship went round and round: now a strong arm was supporting her, a strong hand pushing her head down till her head drove hard against her breast; a purple curtain waved and her ears sang.

"It helps when you put your head like that—fetches the blood right back. Kind of awkward to flop over with all these darn men round. Feeling better?"

"I—I'm all right now."

"Just a minute—" she got the touch of fingers gently firm—"you've lovely hair, haven't you? Mine's starting to thin already; turn your head a little—there. Say, I saw that hat before the camel grabbed it, saw it the minute you came aboard; it was a dandy. I know just how you feel. Not going inside, eh?"

"No, I'll stay here, and thanks for your kindness."

"Forget it. Heading for Victoria, ain't you?"

"I'm going to the Cariboo," said Mary stiffly.

"Say—you ain't—" the girl stared at her— "no, I guess not. What's taking you there anyway?"

"My father and mother; why shouldn't they?" The world was horizontal again, she felt steadier, she was grateful, but the red shoes were leering up at her: she wanted no more of this company.

"No reason I know of; Canada's wide open, you'll find that out for yourself. I guess I made a mistake butting in here."

She broke off, set her elbows on the rail, hunching her shoulders. When she turned her expression had changed; she looked older, the china-blue eyes somehow dead.

"Don't like talking to strangers, do you? Well, that's all right too."

"I didn't say so," snapped Mary.

"You didn't have to. Well, so long—good luck in the Cariboo—you'll need it."

With this she gave her head a toss, and went off with the loose, easy stride of a man, leaving Mary with a feeling of shame. She'd been mean, thankless, but the paint and powder and scent and red shoes were eloquent, and, anyway, she'd never see the girl again.

She felt better after that; the pain in her scalp was subsiding. With this she was aware of something new stirring pleasantly within her; for almost the first time in her life she was alone, and strangely alive. The littered deck and weaving necks of the camels, the cream-bellied mules and all these men, most of them young and bearded, the crepitan pulsation under her feet, the thrash of paddle and smell of the sea—she was a part of all this and bound for the golden Cariboo; and was just going down to tell her mother about the adventure when a man who had been watching her came over, and took off his wide-brimmed clerical hat with a flourish.

"Not hurt, miss, are you? It happened so quick I couldn't pull you back. Them camels ain't to be trusted anyhow."

He was tall, clean-shaven, thin, long-jawed; he had a sacerdotal manner. His linen was fine and clean; his eyes—large, dark, almost mournful—expressed a sort of languid benignancy.

"No," said she, "I'm not really hurt, just a bit scared. That hat cost fifteen dollars."

"It was certainly handsome, miss; I noticed it myself."

"It isn't the only one I have." With this she sent him a sidelong look: certainly he was a gambler, with long, white, smooth hands whose carefully tended fingers could read the pin-pricked back of a card like print. She had heard Dan describe just such artists in Stanleytown, and it was fascinating to meet one here in the flesh. He was high-toned, he had admired her hat, and in his dark eyes she caught something that from a man so much older than herself was flattering.

"But perhaps," she went on, "it wasn't just the right hat for the Cariboo."

His brows went up. "Going in there yourself, miss?"

"Yes, and my name is Mary Bowers. What's yours?"

"Flint, miss, Lemuel Flint, that's my name. I reached Frisco just two weeks ago from the Isthmus to have a look around, then changed my plans."

"You're not a miner, Mr. Flint?" She leaned back on the rail, assumed an air of assurance, hoped that Ma would remain below and give her a chance.

Mr. Flint took out a large silk kerchief, dabbed his nose, tucked it away with just a small triangle visible at the breast pocket. "No, miss, though my affairs are related with the mining business. I have been inspecting mining camps round this country. When I strike one that looks real good, I might make an investment—then again I might not. Right now I'm on my way to these Cariboo fields."

Mary gave a smile—a small one, discreet, maidenly—just a curve of the lip and lifting of long, dark lashes. She was pleased when Mr. Flint smiled back, which showed that a gambler could be quite a gent. Though Ma might be right about talking to strange women, it needn't be the same with men; and it was nice to be chatting like this to one who came up and told you about himself right away. There were gamblers and gamblers, and this one was certainly not the kind Dan had described.

"It must be interesting to spend your life like that—to go round just where you want to. A woman couldn't," she added largely.

"It is, miss, and sometimes it ain't. There's successes and reverses—you break about even, maybe a little ahead; you get lonely now and then, and tired of perambulating. No, a man ain't of much account nowadays without a home. Fond of poetry, miss?"

"Why—why, yes, ever so fond; are you?"

"I was raised on poetry. Speaking of home, there's some lines come back to me now—a Mr. Byron wrote 'em:—

'How good to hear the hairy sheepdog's bark
Cough out his welcome as we draw near home.'

You going right through to Richfield?"

"Yes, right through—Ma and Pa and me. He sold out on Telegraph Hill to the Clancys," she went on. "We had a truck garden there, but Pa figured he'd make his pile quicker in the Cariboo, and——"

"Mary, you come right here this minute!"

She blinked: Mr. Flint, through long training, suppressed any sign of surprise; his face did not change, or his eyes. He just waited a second, turned, and took off his hat. Mrs. Bowers was close by, bristling; she gave him one lightning glance that swept over and through him, and lifted her chin.

"Daughter, you hear me!"

"Yes, Ma, but I wasn't——"

"Permit me, ma'am, I just stepped up to ask if the young lady was hurt."

"Hurt! Who hurt her?"

"No one, Ma, but a camel got my hat—ate it right off my head—and a woman, I mean a girl, was real kind and fixed my hair: and this gentleman—he saw what happened—just wanted to know if I was all right, and that's all, and I don't see why——"

Mrs. Bowers wheeled. "When I want our daughter to go parading round with a——"

"Excuse me, ma'am," the voice was silky, "we did no parading, which is not to say it wouldn't have been a pleasure."

"What's your name?"

"Flint, ma'am, Lemuel Flint, raised in Oswego, New York."

"Well, Mr. Flint, when I want our daughter to associate with a tinhorn gambler I'll send for you; meantime we'll get along somehow."

That missed fire. He remained passive; gave her a bow of icy dignity, sent Mary a look that conveyed understanding seasoned with humour, then strolled off with an air of abstraction.

But Lemuel felt hurt. To his own private astonishment he had been genuinely attracted—he wanted to be of service. He was no philanderer, his views about women almost Puritanical; he never discussed them, but appreciated a neat ankle and was invariably gallant. There might, he admitted, come the day when he would require a wife, and somehow the disordered tresses of Miss Bowers had given him an unexpected jolt. For the rest of it, he carried no gun; he did not smoke, though he used cigars for social purposes; he touched no liquor—this for business reasons—and he never swore. Lemuel had his standards.

Presently his roving gaze lighted on a group of men

Cariboo Road

whose backs were towards him as they pored over a map flattened out on the deck, and from one hip pocket protruded a wallet of engaging fatness. Mr. Flint gave a lightning look; he was safe! It needed only a touch. In a fraction of time he had it.

He strolled on. A few moments later he approached the camel corral where Mr. Frank Laumeister entertained some fellow travellers with a lesson in natural history:—

"Yessir, those critters cost us just one thousand each; we reckon to pay for 'em in four trips into Williams Creek. They feed 'emselves on thistles an' sagebrush, don't need no attention no more'n a jack rabbit, an' take a drink about once a month."

"Kind of sour-tempered, ain't they?" enquired Lemuel.

"No, sir, not if you meet 'em halfway; not any more'n you nor me."

"Easy to handle?" asked another.

"Well, they lead a sort of private life, an' you've got to respect that."

"One drink a month is liable to sour anyone's temper, ain't it?"

Mr. Laumeister shook his head. "You treat a camel right an' he'll forget to drink."

"What'll they carry anyway?"

"Four hundred and fifty, and don't feel it. Those Bactrians hold twice the water of single humpers—they humps is storage tanks."

"Load 'em with a stepladder or a crane?" demanded a voice.

"Give me a goddam mule any day," grunted a prospector from the Tuolumne.

"Take you long to get used to the smell?" asked Lemuel.

The tone was so affable, the smell so pervading, the question therefore so apposite, that Mr. Laumeister could take no offence.

"Stranger, the camel that don't smell ain't worth his

keep. The stink, sir, comes from a gland; the bigger the gland the stronger the stink and the more load they carry. These animals were selected for their stink."

Lemuel sniffed, smiled, moved on with the detachment that became him so well; never had he felt more confident of the immediate future. Crowded on the *Brother Jonathan* were four hundred full-blooded, weatherbeaten, high-spirited men, and they all had money. True that the voyage started with a slight social rebuff, but that was compensated by the pressure in his breast pocket, and he was thus musing when he reached a motionless group of three. This brought him to a halt. Two he had reason to know, the woman and the girl; but the third, a big, stocky man, was new to him. The woman was sitting on a bundle, her eyes dull and sunken like those of a drowned person under the ice, and each face had the same blank, stony despair.

"Don't, mother, don't," said the man thickly, "we'll find it, course we'll find it."

He ran his hands over his pockets—breast, side and hip—in the fashion of one who doesn't expect to find anything but couldn't help these aimless motions, lingering and pressing while the woman kept gazing at him, shaking her head with slowing regularity like a pendulum before it stops.

Lemuel stood very still. Another girl had come up, the one with red shoes; she regarded the three, heard the man, turned to Lemuel, then to Mary:—

"Oh, it's you! What's the matter now?"

Mary slid her arm into the man's; looked as though someone had struck her.

"Pa's been robbed."

"Robbed! How much?"

"I—I had it in my hip pocket—here—not ten minutes ago!" said the man thickly. "I was back at the stern with some other fellows looking over a map. Say, mother, don't take on so, don't look like that—we'll find it all right."

"Find it!" she stared up at him, "you'll never find it, not on this boat. What'll we do now?"

"How much?" said the yellow-haired girl again.

"Twenty-five hundred—we sold our place—it's all we had. We're making for the Cariboo. I'm Dan Bowers; this is my wife—our Mary. Oh Christ!"

Lemuel breathed deeply. His dark eyes met other blue ones; they exchanged something, a sort of acknowledgment that they had enough in common to understand each other. They had the freemasonry of their kind; each possessed an experience lacked by these helpless, stranded folk, so, naturally, it was up to them to do something. Lemuel gave her a little nod, but conscience was stinging and the wallet in his pocket weighed like lead.

"What's your name, mister?" asked she.

He told her, and she said, "Mine's Marta—Marta Zeiss." They exchanged another glance. Meantime men were coming up to see what the matter was here, sensed the presence of tragedy, and stayed, while the word got about. In a few moments the Bowers family, instead of being just three ordinary folk in a bunch of four hundred, had become distinctive and objects of compassionate interest, for were they not all on the same great, blind, desperate venture, and to be choked off like this was rough, tough luck.

Marta gave Lemuel a nudge. "We'd better get started while the boys are kind of sorry—gimme your hat."

He pushed back his thick, black hair like an actor; the rows of men were now six deep, peering over each others' shoulders. He had an audience—so with one hand inside his right lapel and the other on his hip, he drew himself up and said so all could hear:—

"Mr. Bowers, is it right that your pocket's been picked of twenty-five hundred?"

"That's so, sir, twenty-five greenbacks for a hundred each in a black wallet. I had it maybe fifteen minutes ago; Mrs. Bowers here and our Mary—they know."

"Any idea who lifted it?"

"None at all, I didn't feel a touch—it just went. We're cleaned out."

"Mr. Bowers, before this goes any further would you care to search me? I'd kind of welcome that here and now."

The voice was so calm, so confident, so readily did he offer himself, that there could be but one answer: Mr. Bowers shook his head with vigour, while Ma, pushing aside one wild fantastic thought, gazed at him with penitential wonder.

"No, sir, I guess you're the last that needs searching, but that don't help much. Just fifteen minutes ago—"

"Get going while it's good!" Lemuel felt another nudge from Miss Zeiss, "you can't hold 'em long."

"Gents," he began—a hand lifted as in benediction, a kindly light in his large grave eyes—"some low-down, ring-tailed skunk is standing right here on this boat with them greenbacks in his pants—the Bowers family greenbacks. One of us is the guilty party, but who it is we'll never know. That don't restore the money. Are we going to stand round and see the innocent suffer?"

"Start her off yourself, stranger."

"Certainly." Lemuel smiled, took out a roll of bills, peeled off five; they fluttered impressively into the hat. "Gents, I open her for a hundred; now it's your ante, but whatever cards you hold, Miss Bowers scoops the pot."

Miss Zeiss got into action, there was a feeling for and production of other rolls; they decided to be generous. The hat kept in motion on its beneficent round—a sort of wedge of mercy whose apex was Marta, gay, smiling; its base the arresting figure of Lemuel, he not so absorbed in his mission that he failed to note with professional interest the size of successive wads and their respective owners. Ma had not stirred, the affair was beyond her. She sat clenching her fingers, divided between humiliation and relief.

The hat came back stuffed with greenbacks. Lemuel made a bow transcending every former salute:—

“Miss Bowers, speaking for the passengers on this boat with the exception of three human skunks that wouldn’t cash in, we ask you to accept this.”

Thus delivered, he put it into her hands, and walked off bareheaded to the rail where he stood contemplating the shore of northern California.

The happenings of the next twenty-four hours—at the end of which Lemuel found himself chastened, thankful, and so to speak taken to the bosom of the Bowers family—these happenings left him secretly astonished. He did not believe in Providence, nor had Providence any tangible reason for believing in him; neither had he any fixed ideas about the doctrine of compensation—or retribution—but certainly all these factors were involved in what shortly took place.

It began that same evening when, with a familiar itch in his fingers, he set out to arrange a small game in the cabin of the second engineer who would be out of the way till midnight. Strangely enough every Argonaut declined his invitation except the three who had resisted the blandishments of Miss Zeiss. This trio, much to his surprise, sat in with readiness, and the game developed along his chosen line. He had lost to begin with, won a trifle back, lost more heavily; he displayed the usual symptoms of recklessness, the wave of human optimism. Presently, when his deal came round, he suggested a jackpot. His opponents, he happened to know, held nothing better than two pair; while he himself possessed four of a kind.

At this point he said “Gents, I’ll open her for fifty.”

The result was totally unexpected; one man moved his chair to the cabin door and sat on it, the second rose and stood behind Lemuel, the third laid a long-barrelled Colt on the table.

"You'll open her for twenty-five hundred in greenbacks, you low-down, ring-tailed skunk."

Lemuel sat very still; the inference could not be misread—or the action. He wetted his lips, felt a little sick and helpless, but nothing broke his outward calm while his brain ticked this way and that. The oil lamp overhead gave out a foul odour, and the temper of the three opposite began to smoulder.

Presently one of them said:

"It's no good, Flint, and you know it. I saw you lift that wallet when Bowers was stooping over the map; had my eyes right on you or I'd have missed it."

"You did!" breathed Lemuel.

"Sure I did. Pretty slick too. I had a mind to do something then, but, well—I certainly admired that offer to be searched; felt like searching you myself, but thought of something better."

"So—?" the voice had a faint quiver.

"There's four of us here—that's four into twenty-five hundred."

"And if I don't?"

"If you don't, you won't feel so much like a benefactor. You made us tired parading round after that hat—quite a story—look well in the papers, eh?"

This, silently admitted Lemuel, was true; the mere thought appalled him.

"Care to come up on deck and be searched right now?" queried the inquisitor.

Lemuel recoiled; he saw at this moment the dark locks and bright eyes of Miss Mary Bowers. With that vision his last defence went to pieces; he breathed deeply through his nose, expanding it so that the nostrils turned white, a sign he only gave in times of stress. The gun had not frightened him at all, but the truth—he feared the truth—so with a sort of wounded dignity he put his hand into his breast pocket and said:

"Gents, fact is you've got me where the hair is short. Do I take it this stops here and now—there's reasons."

"What reasons?"

"Personal—I guess we all have our private lives; ain't there someone, somewhere, for each of us that would be demoralised all round if—well—you see what I mean?"

"Darned if I do."

"Ain't every man entitled to hide his scars if he's a mind to?"

This, given in the manner of one who is baring his very soul, had a certain effect.

"Sure he is, Flint, sure he is; but if you're reckoning that maybe the same don't apply to us, I'm reminding you it's three to one."

Lemuel with a sigh produced twenty-five greenbacks, flattened them slowly, regretfully, re-buttoned his frock coat.

"I'm going you one better; I'm not taking any part of this."

"You ain't!"

"No, gents, not a dollar; reasons are my own. I'll catch up later on something else. Ship's starting to roll, ain't she? '*Roll right on, you dark deep ocean, roll,*' as the poet, Mr. Milton, puts it. So long."

Back to back, he experienced a sensation entirely novel. It had nothing to do with the increasing motion of the vessel—it was elevating, not depressing; spiritual not physical a sense of liberation that remained and strengthened him. He was out twenty-five hundred, yet he felt no loss; he had on the contrary a warming sense of virtue to which he had long been stranger. No more the doublefaced possessor of wealth stolen from the innocent, he stood sniffing the Pacific air, reappointed captain of his soul, purged and purified.

Next morning the kaleidoscope of life gave another twist.

Ma and the family were camped on deck; she felt thwarted. There had been no chance to say thank you

in the way she wanted to; Mr. Flint seemed to have vanished, also Miss Zeiss, and she wondered why.

"Dan," she said of a sudden. "I feel bad."

"What's the matter, mother?"

"I just can't stand it any longer; Mary's the same. Yesterday I let right out at that Mr. Flint—told him I'd let him know when he was wanted for company for daughter. I was downright hostile, but he just took off his hat. That Miss Zeiss too, she was real kind to Mary, who just froze her stiff. Then see what they both did!"

Dan listened, saying nothing.

"Dan, I've been meaner'n a coyote; there's the two of 'em both jumped on, and where'd we be without 'em."

"I guess after this you'd better—" he broke off, looking dubious.

"Better what? Say it."

"Be a mite less particular and more sociable: we're going to meet all sorts of folks—met some already. I respect your wishes, so does daughter, but just the same—"

"I thought I'd die when that hat came back with over one thousand dollars," said Mary.

"Thousand and twenty, I've got it right here this time," Ma laid her hand under her left breast, "and—why Miss Zeiss, good morning!"

Miss Zeiss, coming along the deck, gave a distant nod.

"We're certainly glad to see you—where've you been since last night? You were asleep when I went to bed, and slept right through when I got up. Seen Mr. Flint to-day?"

"No, I haven't."

"Neither have we—won't you sit?"

"Thanks, not just now." She walked on, chin up.

"She's hurt," grunted Dan, "hurt right through: more'n that she's mad. I don't blame her either."

"Doing what she did, she couldn't be mad," objected Ma miserably.

"She's mad and good-hearted at the same time."

Ma said nothing to that, she was too unhappy. It seemed you couldn't tell a thing from the way people looked or dressed, you just had to take chances all the time, and there was no point in keeping guard over her family any more. Now she mistrusted her own judgment as never before and—

"Why, good morning, Mr. Flint!"

Lemuel's tall figure appeared; he had shaved in the engine-room—the only place where hot water was available, his boots shone, he wore a clean collar, and in this frowsy multitude looked more than ever distinguished. Furthermore he was at peace with himself, the future with all its possibilities gleamed before him. What more could one ask.

"Good morning, ladies." He raised his hat, passed on.

This was too much; Ma's eyes filled with tears. She rose, shook her skirt.

"Where you going now, mother?"

"That's my business—you folks wait here."

How she did it she never told them, only they saw her catch up with Lemuel and take hold of his arm, and he stooped while she said something. After he'd hesitated a moment they went on together and presently came back with Miss Zeiss, all quite sociable and Miss Zeiss smiling. Then they settled down as though nothing special had happened, and the talk instead of being stiff from the start was easy. Ma, catching the look in Dan's eyes, sent him a little nod to promise it wouldn't happen again, and almost at once the two women were asking Marta about the Cariboo, while Dan strolled off with Lemuel as though they'd known each other all their lives.

Marta watched them go, and gave a sigh of content. She wore a small nugget on a silk cord; she fingered this for a moment, gave Ma a straight look and said:—

"It's nice to talk to a woman, I don't often get the chance; you won't either up in Richfield."

"What's Richfield like anyway?"

"It's one godawful place, Mrs. Bowers, you might as well know it now. I wouldn't go in—not if you don't have to."

"Why so terrible, Miss Zeiss?"

"Marta'll do for me—it's so darn lonely."

"I'd have thought you'd—" Ma broke off, confused.

Marta bristled. "Always the same, isn't it? God have mercy on her poor soul—that's what you're thinking."

"You're the kindest girl in the world," exclaimed Mary, "and Ma feels the same."

"I certainly do, Miss—Marta, and after what—"

"Ever meet a Hurdy before, a real honest to God one?"

"I have, yes, and there's nothing to worry about."

"It's you doing the worrying; know what a Hurdy is?"

"I do, and right here I want to—"

"No you don't, Mrs. Bowers, not by your face, so I'll tell you though it won't do any good."

Ma was distressed, she wanted anything but this; couldn't understand why the girl was so persistent, with Mary drinking in every word.

"There's a heap of things I don't know," she said gently.

"That's a fact; well, a Hurdy dances—if you call it dancing—I don't—till her feet swell with being tramped on. She drinks, sure, she drinks, but it's always cold tea because it looks like whiskey, and nothing else. That's all she does, not another darn thing except keep smiling till her mouth is stretched—you'll notice I ain't smiling now which is quite a treat—and for seven hours a day she's slung around like a sack of beans by men she don't know one from the other. You're a Methody, ain't you?"

"Why—how did you know?"

"Just felt it, I always feel it when folks kind of sit in judgment. We make pretty good money, we Hurdies, but, Gosh! we pay for it; it's women friends we miss. It's tough

Cariboo Road

to be without men friends, but the other way on it's worse."

Ma gave a gulp, took Marta's hand, squeezed hard. "I'm sorry—I'm sorry."

"That's all right, no harm done, and for the rest of it—I mean the part every woman thinks about—if I ever get a husband he'll find all that a husband's entitled to. See what I mean?"

"Yes, my dear, I do."

"I've been wanting to say this to some other woman an when I saw you folks come aboard, an' heard you were heading for the Cariboo, I—oh pshaw!"

She choked a little, her eyes were wet, her breast stormy. All her bold assurance gone, she became just a big-boned, fair-skinned, painted, tired looking woman neither young nor old, who had too much human experience behind her and nothing in promise for the future. She looked wistfully at Mary.

"Marta, said the girl swiftly, "I'm so glad we found each other—glad we're going in with you. Aren't you, Ma?"

"I certainly am."

"Same here," nodded Dan.

Marta's smile came like sunlight after rain. "Anyone'd do that for folks in hard luck. I'd sooner have this happen than a barrel of money; what started you people for the Cariboo anyway?"

"All the talk he heard made my husband restless, and, well, here we are."

"Anywhere to go back to—just in case?"

"Not now," said Ma soberly.

"It's like that with me; makes one think once in a while. You'll find things tough after a real home, but it's peaceable, surprise you how peaceable."

"Any law and order in those parts, Marta?"

"Judge Begbie won't stand for anything else; there's no shooting at all."

Ma took heart at this, she was liking the girl more and more.

"What about the winter?"

"You'd freeze stiff if there weren't lots of wood; trails all plugged; they don't send out any gold in winter. I was living with another Hurdy on Williams Lake, that's on the way to Richfield. She's Leaping Lena, the boys call her The Kangaroo, and she's all right too—same as me in every way, and—"

"A noble view, Mrs. Bowers, a noble view." Mr. Flint had come up and was indicating the Cascade Range, "the longer I live the more I'm impressed with the beauties of nature."

"Yes, sir," beamed Ma, "it is, and different from Frisco Bay: sit right down here; move over, daughter—Dan, you take that box."

"Obliged, ma'am." Lemuel folded his long legs, sat, took off his hat, pushed back his long hair; "reminds me of what the poet said, *'the man that has no beauty in his soul ain't fit for hardly anything'*."

"That's so, and right here before the others I want to say I'm sorry for my words yesterday; same with our Mary."

"Mrs. Bowers, don't you mention that any more; yesterday is—" he paused, gave a grave smile—"yesterday is all over, and anyway you weren't so far out."

"I was just downright rude."

"Well, ma'am, you certainly let go what came into your head, but maybe that's not unusual."

"You bet it ain't," chuckled Dan. "how'd you know?"

"Character, Mr. Bowers, character. No, ma'am, any mother might feel the way you did till she knew better."

"That's so, Mr. Flint, that's so."

"But I'm making no apologies; fact is I never worked in my life, and don't aim to start now. No, ma'am, my gift is cards—comes natural—and the man that shuts his

eyes to his own gifts ain't hardly human. But I'm no tin horn gambler—that's a class I don't approve of."

"Well, sir, you don't have to say another word. Right now we're taking as big a gamble as ever you did in your life."

"That's a fact, ma'am; I admire your spunk."

"You see," she went on, feeling more sociable every minute, "we didn't have to sell out. We could have stayed back on Telegraph Hill raising garden truck till kingdom come, but it wasn't just the right neighbourhood for our Mary, and Dan got restive, and we figured that while the Cariboo might be tough it couldn't be any tougher. That's about it, eh, Dan?"

"That's it. There was too much shooting and killing next door in Stanleytown; it went on all the time."

"Ever strike a party called English Jim?" asked Mr. Flint.

"Sure I did. The Vigilance Committee hung him on the Market Street wharf for murder; then The Miscreant—his name was John Jenkins—in Portsmouth Square; then The Sydney Ducks were strung out on a beam from a second storey window. No, sir, it weren't the place for decent folks, not even with cabbages at fifty cents a head."

"Pretty active days," agreed Mr. Flint. "Happen to be acquainted with a friend of mine, James P. Casey? He worked on a newspaper back east—came west a few years ago. Have a cigar?"

"James P. Casey," said Mr. Bowers, accepting with readiness, "was hung by the Committee from the same beam as The Sydney Ducks; he'd shot James King of the California Bulletin through the heart."

"Is that so? Many's the time I told him to—"

"Mr. Flint," broke in Ma, "you act like you'd forgotten something; ain't you interested any longer in what happened yesterday?"

"No, ma'am, no! Not so as you folks are satisfied."

"Do you know how much money was in that hat?" exploded Mary.

"No, miss; anyway it's your money."

"My gracious! but you're a strange man; there was just one thousand and twenty dollars."

"Yes, sir," put in Ma, "and I've got it right here on my person where it won't be lifted."

"Fourteen hundred and eighty to the bad, eh?"

He said this with no enthusiasm, but only regretted the Bowers family was left short.

"Ye—es, we're that. I guess I should have carried it myself, but Dan, he—"

"Pa'll know better next time, won't you, Pa?" put in Mary.

Ma looked grave. "It seems a lot to us, Mr. Flint. You never had any idea who took it?"

Lemuel was stumped and made a little gesture that might have meant anything. He liked these people, especially Mary, and couldn't lie in their faces. He had a feeling of privilege in such company, it being superior to any he had shared for years, and for a man of his profession to be associated with folks like the Bowers was a social asset. This was racing through his head as Ma went on:

"Of course twenty-five hundred in cash was more'n we ever had before all at once. Tim Clancy brought it over from the Fargo Express the night before we left, and the bills were so nice and clean, and the numbers ran straight on, and I took them down, and——"

"You took the numbers down!" Lemuel's tone was suddenly tense.

"Yes, I did; I thought it'd be interesting if ever one came round to us again, and perhaps—why, Mr. Flint, what is the matter?"

"Nothing, ma'am, nothing," said he earnestly, "but have you got those numbers on you now?"

"Right here, but they're no good; you can't search four hundred men, can you?"

"Could I have the figures?—no, not your paper, you hang onto that." He took out a small notebook and slim silver pencil, his voice had a shake in it, "you read 'em to me."

She did this; they all noticed how quickly his fingers moved, and he didn't lick the pencil once. Marta had an odd expression that Mary couldn't understand; it was a little cold and hard, but that passed, and they waited till he looked up and said:

"Mrs. Bowers, ma'am, you asked me if I'd any idea who stole that wallet; well, I had, but—" here he gazed thoughtfully at the white crown of Mount Shasta—"the fact is I was in no position to act on it, while here—" he tapped the notebook, "we've got something, and I wouldn't be surprised if you folks finished this trip a thousand and twenty ahead instead of fourteen hundred and eighty short."

"Why, Mr. Flint, what do you mean?"

"You said you can't search four hundred men, and that's right, but you can search three."

"Three! what three?"

"You leave it to me, ma'am; sit right here till I get back. Come on, Mr. Bowers."

In later and better years, Ma liked to tell about it; she liked to describe how Lemuel went off with Dan hard after him, went right up to the bridge where passengers weren't allowed, and talked to the Captain who at first didn't seem interested, but he soon was, and the three of them came down, and she could see the Captain had a gun in his pocket, Lemuel's notebook in his hand. He asked her if what Lemuel had told him was true, and the numbers of the notes. She said yes. Then they went back to the stern of the boat and found three men asleep in the sun, and Lemuel said, "Those are the skunks," and the Captain

woke them with his foot, and Dan searched them, and found the bills numbered just right. Then they swore they'd won them off Lemuel at poker, which was a bad guess since everybody knew that Lemuel had offered to be searched the minute he heard about the robbery. So the three were taken below decks and locked in a storeroom where the Captain said they'd stay till the boat got back to Frisco for the *Brother Jonathan* was American soil, and the wallet was stolen on American soil, and they'd have to be tried in the United States. Then he put the money right into her hands, and when she said they must return the collection he laughed, and told her if she tried that it'd take the twenty-five hundred as well as the ten twenty, for who was to know who gave how much, and nobody was kicking anyway, and the Bowers family was in luck to strike a friend as smart as Lemuel Flint.

And always before she finished the story, Ma would give her head an odd little shake, and look thoughtful, and add, "You never can tell, can you? Now just listen to what happened after we hit the Cariboo."

That night she and Dan found a corner on deck to themselves, where she sat very thoughtfully for some time, then said:

"Husband, I can't get things straightened out."

"They're a lot straighter than they were."

"I'm all mixed up; of course we couldn't tell what we'd strike on this trip, now I can't figure it out—I'm kind of scared."

"You were never scared in your life."

"Not in the same way; everything's so darn uprooted—specially my judgment—maybe I've counted too much on that—it don't seem to fit any more."

"We wouldn't be here this minute if it wasn't for you," he said gently.

"We'd be right on Telegraph Hill if I had any sense."

"Now look here, mother, if—"

Cariboo Road

"You keep quiet till I get this over. Whenever we talked about this trip we always said we'd keep ourselves to ourselves, friendly but not too sociable, till we got the run of things."

"I haven't touched liquor since we started."

"That's so, but see what's happened? Right away there's that gambler and a dancing girl. We're obligated, Dan, obligated up to the neck; we'll step ashore in Canada, and those two are our best friends."

Mr. Bowers grunted, waited.

"Why don't you speak?" she asked tartly.

"Didn't think you'd finished, mother."

"Neither I have. Oh, Dan, I keep wondering what's in front of us! When we came across the prairies it was with other families, lots of 'em, and I keep thinking of the fires at night, and the faces round them. Remember I used to call 'em family fires, but this gold-hunting seems to shoot a family all to pieces, and I want to hold ours together—somehow—that's in my head all the time, so I'm wondering if I can do it and carry my share of the load."

He gave her a squeeze; just once before had she talked like this, then only for a moment when a Navajo arrow ripped through the top of a covered wagon and grazed her cheek. They were both here on account of him, only six women had wintered on Williams Creek; it was now make or break, and the Cariboo offered them no such golden dream as glowed before his own eyes—yet here she was, asking nothing for herself—only could she carry her part of the load.

"Maybe I was too set on it, mother."

"Dan Bowers, don't you start talking like that; of course you're set on it. Marta says that country ain't hardly scratched yet, so you start scratching pronto as soon as we get there."

"That's what I aim to do."

"We're finishing this trip a thousand dollars ahead."

Those boys won't take it back. I guess a kinder-hearted crowd never made for any goldfield."

"That's so, mother. Course there's Mary."

Ma nodded. "I was talking to Marta about that, and she says so long as Mary don't get flighty, an' holds her eyes straight ahead, she's safe as a Methody prayer meeting. Is that Canada we're looking at now?"



2

In the Fraser Canyon

WHEN the Bowers, having transhipped to the smaller steamer *Enterprise* at Victoria, reached Yale, gateway to the Cariboo, the Fraser was in flood. It came racing through booming canyons, leaping barriers of dolomite, in its tawny bosom great trees brandished huge black roots on their way to the Pacific. Back in the Coast Range, whose grey flanks were ribbed with a jewelled tracery of cataracts, a thousand glaciers were weeping resplendent tears; the dark forest dripped in silence. Further back, the Gold Range, the Rockies and Selkirks lifted their jagged backbones, cutting off the Crown Colony of British Columbia from the rest of Canada. Here stretched the domain of the bald eagle, grizzly and mountain sheep. No trails threaded that vast confusion; England was nearer by way of the Isthmus or the Cape unless one braved the American prairies, the Sioux and the Navajos.

The *Enterprise*, crammed with men till her decks were invisible, pushed past New Westminster, past Hope, to set her blunt nose against the clay bank, while Ma Bowers stared at the boom settlement.

"My gracious, Dan! It looks no better than Stanleytown."

"Maybe not, but we won't be here long; stand back, let this gang off."

The boat vomited men like burdened ants under an agitated sea of boxes and hundles; they spread out fan-like to be lost in this wide setting, swallowed by thousands of other Argonauts straining for the Cariboo.

At the height of the rush a man toppled from the gang-plank, dropped ten feet into the Fraser. He was spun away. The Bowers, hearing his shout, made for the rail. They could see his fair head. The river was tugging at the bundle he still gripped. Clinging to this, he was passed by one gurgling, gurgitating whirlpool to the next. Now the bundle grew sodden, dragging him down, so he released it, made a few desperate strokes towards a drifting pine. He reached it. A cheer came from the bank as he climbed, perched on it like a waterbeetle, rode it like a jockey, and slid seaward. The tree clung to the humped centre of the river, where the current made seven miles an hour.

"They'll get him—they'll get him!" squeaked Ma tensely.

Dan was dubious; no boat, he thought, could live in that torrent; a moiling log would founder it, crush it to splinters.

"Likely he'll ground in some shallows lower down—those roots are bound to catch something."

"Pa! He's waving. Look!"

He was waving in a sort of reckless farewell; a laugh rose from the bank; they didn't know who the lad was, but the right sort anyway, and tough luck to be heading for the Pacific instead of Williams Creek. Ma's lips were dry; she stood watching, eyes misty, till tree and rider swung round a bend. Then they went ashore in a kind of grim silence, and found Marta waiting. Mr. Flint had disappeared.

"That was just too bad, wasn't it?" said Marta. "But he'll get ashore all right. You two had better camp right here on the bank till Mr. Bowers has fixed up for a room."

"Where'll we get a room here?"

"I'd try the Rat Trap, first come first served. It's noisy, but it ain't the worst. I'm going round to stay with a friend who can maybe find a corner for me. Now Mr. Bowers, you get moving."

"That all right for you, mother?"

"Sure—you push along—get back soon as you can—we'll look after the stuff."

"There's six thousand men in Yale all hunting a hole to sleep in; this town's wide open," put in Marta restlessly.

They went off; men kept passing and glancing at the two with frank interest, some touched their hats, none spoke. From the tawny river came a low hissing rush, slabs of greasy clay slid down to be snatched away. Higher up where the Fraser burst triumphantly from its mountain prison there sounded softened thuds, the plunge of huge boulders, the rattle of broken rock where British Engineers carved the new Cariboo Road against the adamant cheek of a canyon.

"I hope he won't be drowned, that young man," said Mary, staring downstream, "I saw him on the boat several times; he kept looking at me and smiling as though he wanted to speak, but he didn't. He was so young, Ma, not much older than me."

"I hope not, daughter; it's pretty rough to start in like that and lose all you have, maybe your life."

Mary said nothing more; they were both thinking about the boy. Time passed and silence fell over them as they watched the ceaseless swirl of men. To Ma there seemed to be three kinds if one judged by their expressions; one optimistic, eager; another grim, disillusioned; a third indifferent, apathetic.

The half mile of Main Street was mostly saloons with thin, false fronts sticking up above the second storey to make them look larger. Some had balconies at the first floor; they were all built of lumber with an occasional splash of paint, and came right up to the four-foot sidewalk which spilled its surplus onto the earth road. From sidewalk to river bank was a hundred-yard strip of trampled sod with piles of dunnage and lumber, boxes, bales of hay, sacks of oats, with men swarming like bees. There were

hundreds of tents on rising ground that led to a jack-pine crowned summit etched against the sky; it was queerly shaped with a slow hump, and called the Jew's Nose. Further upstream emptied a torrent called Yale Creek, from which flumes carried water to gravel claims in the bed of the Fraser when these were exposed. Now they lay thirty feet below the swirling, coffee-coloured surface. At the mouth of the creek huddled a cluster of Siwash shacks.

In Yale had gathered all nationalities: Britishers in low-crowned, hard felt hats, leather leggings, short coats that exposed their buttocks; flatfaced Chinese in conical straw hats, straw slippers, baggy trousers; Siwash Indians, the old aristocracy of the Fraser, parading with fresh speared salmon dangling over their shoulders—ten cents a pound. Hurdies in red waists, cotton print skirts, heads topped like that of the male turkey, strolled arm in arm, but never alone; mule trains waited in patient lines beside low, log-walled sheds; in dance halls and gambling houses sounded a babel; a crowd had gathered round Mr. Laumeister and his camels—and over it all the magic spell of gold.

It seemed to Ma that this whole urgent company was moving, moving without knowing it, moving slowly towards the great granite jaws and roaring gullet of mountains that yawned wide to receive them. "This way—if you dare," growled the unconquered ranges.

"There he is, Ma, there he is! He's all right— Oh, I'm so glad."

A young man came towards them from downstream, he was bare-headed, he wore a soaking blue shirt, canvas breeches, black belt. He walked unsteadily, his face grey, eyes sunken, lips blue. Passing them, he forced a kind of grin at Mary; he was moving on when Ma got up and stopped him.

"You sit right down here a minute—I've something for you."

He gave her a tired smile showing very white teeth, then

Cariboo Road

his knees bent, he subsided in a heap. When he came to himself Ma's face was close to his own, strong liquor burned his throat: he coughed, sat up.

"That's kind of you," said he, "awfully kind; I'm better now," he took a long breath, smiled again. "I fell in the river—the sort of thing I would do."

"We saw you riding that log, and you're mighty lucky to get out. Did you lose your stuff?"

"It got soaked and sank—I had to let go or go with it." He frowned, then catching Mary's eye sent her another grin, "Made rather an exhibition of myself, didn't I?"

"I wouldn't call it that; I was scared. Are you bound for Williams Creek?"

"I was, but, now—" he shrugged and broke off, and they were all voiceless for a little, all deeply and privately occupied. Ma was reading the young features—smooth, tanned, with a small, dark moustache, the head well set on wide supple shoulders, hands well shaped, but scarred with work; his body agile, slim, built like a racer. How young he was, she thought, and so much alone, more even than themselves, that her warm heart moved impulsively.

"Lost all your stuff?" said she gently, "that's tough."

"It wasn't much, but enough to get me into the Cariboo; I'll make it somehow, I've come too far to stop now."

"English, aren't you?"

"Yes; my people live near a village called Charing."

"Charing! That's in Kent."

"You know it! That's funny."

Ma shook her head. "No, I don't, never set foot in the country, but my father was born somewheres round there, and I've heard him speak of Charing."

Then all in a moment they swung off into talk of England. He told her he had left nearly a year ago—no room for him at home—at least he had decided he didn't fit in at home—and gone first to New York, whence he worked his way round to Frisco by the Horn and was there caught in

the rush. And while he talked Mary kept looking at him quietly, thoughtfully, and never said a word.

"What's your name, mister?" asked Ma.

"Harper—Harry Harper. I'm just twenty-one."

"Pleased to meet you, Mr. Harper. I'm Mrs. Bowers from Telegraph Hill; this is our Mary; Dan, my husband, will be here any minute."

"Yes," he said, "I know who you are—everyone did on the *Brother Jonathan*."

Ma put out her hand, so did Mary; his was still chilled and stiff. Mary felt shy, awkward, angry with herself for being so attracted, and avoided his eyes; they held a sort of amusement, though there could be little to be amused at. Then they saw the three others coming back, and Harper took one look. "Mrs. Bowers, it's easy to tell which is your husband," at which they all laughed. Dan came up and said:—

"Well, mother, there's mighty little to tell you except there's a room, if you call it a room, which it isn't, at the Rat Trap. It's the only one going, and they ain't trapped all the rats yet, so there's nothing else except sleep out. Who's your friend?"

While Dan talked, Harper was looking hard at Lemuel and Marta, and Mary felt a discomfort. The obligation remained, and always would, and she didn't want this new friend to assume that these were the sort of people the Bowers chose for themselves. Marta was smiling at Harper with her usual frank fellowship. He and Lemuel exchanged a cool nod.

"Dan, this is Mr. Harry Harper of England, and comes right from Charing—the place you've heard me talk about—and he's lost all his stuff."

"Shake, Mr. Harper, we thought you were done for; pretty cold water off the mountains this time of year, eh?"

"It is, rather."

"Meet Miss Zeiss and Mr. Flint, both friends of ours."

Cariboo Road

Marta gave him a hearty grip, and Mary saw that she too was interested; Lemuel put out a smooth hand, and Harper seemed just to touch it, there was even a faint air of hostility. Ma, sensing this, asked Marta about her lodging, and Marta said she was all fixed up with some other Hurdies, and glad of it, and wanted to get out of Yale the very first thing, but they might be hung up for a solid week the way things were.

"That's right too," nodded Dan, "mule teams all booked up toting in freight, grub's run short on Williams. There's been a lot of rich discoveries the minute the snow started to go—a pile of fellows walking—that's four hundred miles—you can't buy or hire a mule for any money."

"Or a camel?" laughed Mary, her eyes on Harper.

"They're going up the trail on a trial trip, and folks say they won't last—the loose rock'll cut their feet to pieces. We'll wait for mules."

"What about you, Mr. Flint?" asked Ma.

"Well, ma'am, I'm staying in Yale for a while anyway; things are active here. Later on I'll be coming in to Richfield—see you before you start. So long, ladies, and it's certainly been a privilege to make your acquaintance; so long, Dan."

Without any look at Harper, he lifted his hat, and went off, and Ma, following him with thoughtful eyes, felt a little shamed, began to talk about nothing in particular. Harper said but little; he nodded politely when spoken to—seemed to take no interest in the Bowers' affairs. He didn't appear anxious or worried about his own, he just sat there with the sun warming his young bones, looking so young that he might have been a schoolboy on holiday, and it was hard to realize that all he owned was drying on his back.

Presently he got up, took a wide-eyed look round that seemed to cover them all, and gave Ma a dignified little salute:—

"You've been very kind to me," he said, "and I thank

you very much indeed!" Then he walked on, whistling, head up.

"My gracious!" exclaimed Ma, taken by surprise, staring after him, "you'd think he hadn't a care in the world."

"Perhaps he hasn't, mother, perhaps he's made that way."

"But, Dan, he's dead broke!"

"Yes, I know, but why worry? He isn't worrying; lots of his sort round here."

"He's only a boy!"

"Want to adopt him?"

"Not with you two on my hands," said she tartly, then, "Mary, you stay right here with Marta, I want to talk to your Pa." She and Dan went downstream, and sat on the bank where he put his legs over and swung his feet; he felt optimistic, he'd picked up a lot about Lowhee and Lightning and Canadian and other creeks where the nuggets had the size of pigeons' eggs. Presently he gave a chuckle, looked at Ma, and said:—

"Go on, though I know what's coming."

"Maybe you do, it's about that boy."

"He's more than a boy right now."

"No woman would see it that way, Dan. An hour ago when he came walking along half-dry I had the queerest feeling like as the Fraser River had said, 'I've no use for him, here, you take him.'"

"You can't reckon what you're getting out of a river these days, mother."

* "That all you've got to tell me?"

"About all right now. Y'know you've got method, more'n most women. You get an idea, sometimes it's a pretty good one, but you don't start right in on it; no, sir, you sit tight and think it over."

"Anything the matter with that, Dan?"

"I'm not saying there is, but when it's too late for me

to do any buck-jumping, out she comes all complete with feathers grown."

Ma put back her head and laughed like a girl. "Getting wise these days, aren't you?"

"It's your money, mother, do what you like with it."

"Dan Bowers, what do you mean?"

"Come on, let's have it."

"The other day," said she, "a lot of folks we don't know did a heap for us; I feel that in my heart. What's more I'm going to pay some of it back."

* * *

The mule train of Mr. Sam Hawkins approached the barge ferry at Spuzzum, fourteen miles above Yale; it was led by a bell mare, phlegmatic veteran of the trail, pursuing her passionless way along a three-foot path, a tinkle at her neck. There followed Mr. Hawkins, some cases of Epsom salts, Mr. Bowers, Ma, a consignment of gunpowder in sixty pound kegs, Miss Zeiss, Miss Bowers, young Harper, a shipment of whiskey—all of these interspersed by three packers. The weather was fine, the time late afternoon.

"How're you making out, honey, how's your nether limbs?" Marta flung it over her shoulder. The women were straddling *aparejos*, leather sacks stuffed with straw, anchored by a broad strap round the beasts' cream-coloured bellies.

"I'm all right, but this animal doesn't take any notice."

"Don't fool yourself, that mule sees more'n you do right now."

"Have I got to ride it four hundred miles?"

"No, honey; if we ever strike Quesnel you'll get aboard an Indian pony."

"Why?"

"Mules ain't risked beyond that, they're too valuable."

"What about passengers?"

"Plenty of them but mules are scarce."

"How far now to the ferry, Marta?"

"Just round the next bend. How's things with you, Mr. Harper?"

He waved a hand, looked happy, carefree; it seemed he was more hungry for adventure than gold. When Dan told him the hundred dollar fare into Williams had been paid, he turned red and refused; he was much obliged, but would sooner walk. He'd work in Yale and earn something first, but there was no work in Yale and a thousand men looking for it; and when Ma asked if he hadn't put something into the hat, he blushed, and said, "Why not?" and that he'd watched them on the *Brother Jonathan* and wanted to talk, but there was no one to introduce him. Ma said the Fraser River had done that. Then matters became easier all round; she bought him more clothes and a blanket at the old H.B. store, and wondered a little wistfully what it would be like to do this for a son of her own, and hoped he'd come in often when they got settled on Williams.

She was thinking about this now, listening to Sam Hawkins talking with Dan. After a week in Yale, Sam was again sober, but his unquenchable thirst remained.

"How's living on Williams now?" she asked. "Expensive?"

"Kind of reasonable—coming down all the time. Flour's touched two fifty."

"What stories do get about; that's less than we paid in California."

"Two hundred an' fifty dollars a barrel, ma'am, only there ain't no barrels; fifty down from last year."

"Sakes alive! Hear him, Dan."

"Candles," resumed Mr. Hawkins, "is only a dollar apiece, dried apples two bucks a pound—quite a run on them apples."

"That's terrible!"

"It ain't so bad as you'd think. If you take some of that

desecrated fruit for breakfast, a drink for dinner, an' let 'em swell for supper, you get along all right."

This struck her to silence; Dan was pensive with mounting misgivings; Sam rambled on:—

"Right here where we are," said he, jerking a thumb at the tawny Fraser, "a couple of years ago you'd have seen that river crawling with men when the water dropped. Lots of 'em made a hundred a day, then started north when they'd cleaned her up."

"Where?"

"Up the Thompson and Bonaparte Creek. The Siwash felt ugly; y'see they'd been trading gold with the H.B. for years—the H.B. used to sell 'em teaspoons to dig it out of the cracks with—an' they raised hell over strangers. I've seen miners floating downstream stuck full of arrows same as a hairbrush."

"Oh God," murmured Ma, staring at the Fraser.

"That's right, but it's all over now. Cap Snyder with a couple of hundred of the boys went up to Spuzzum, caught 'em with their pants down—only they didn't wear any pants—an' put things straight. There's Spuzzum now. Hello, Jim! how's things!"

Mr. James Way, owner of the ferry barge, had a leathery face and bad stomach, which that day was worse than usual; he scowled at Mr. Hawkins, glanced casually at the cavalcade. With considerable perspicacity he had established himself at this vantage point, and all comers, human or animal, meant the same to him. But as it happened he had a peculiar antipathy against Mr. Hawkins, so now he hitched his barge more firmly to the bank, and sat on the rope.

"Not going to act ugly, Jim?" Sam's voice had a touch of deference, you can't do that."

"You wait and see if I can't."

"But this stuff is important."

"Sure! everything is nowadays, maybe you think you're

important too." Mr. Way's lip curled like an autumn leaf. "Last time you crossed you swore you'd square up next time—which is right now, an' like a darn fool I believed you. Nothing doing, Sam—put up or shut up."

"Don't you talk like that; I've got ladies."

Suddenly Mr. Way linked his hands over a troubled stomach, otherwise he remained unmoved:—

"That's their funeral," he sent Ma a twisted look, "sorry, ma'am, but business is business."

"Back where I come from a man wouldn't hold up three women like this," she snapped. "Ain't you ashamed of yourself?"

"No, ma'am, I ain't in any condition for shame, and that's a fact. I ain't dealing with you either, which is another."

Ma flushed, said nothing more.

"Aw, Jim, have a heart," urged Mr. Hawkins.

"My heart don't figure in this at all, it's lower down." Mr. Way paused to master another spasm. "You've got forty mules with maybe two hundred pounds each at sixty cents delivered on Williams—that's round five thousand dollars, ain't it?"

"I guess so, but expenses is high."

"And you owe me a hundred an' seventy bucks."

"That's right. Dang it, I'll swim them over."

"Go right ahead. One pilgrim came along yesterday, an' said the same thing; he started sure enough, but ain't been seen since."

"Drowned?" blurted Sam.

"Couldn't float worth a cent. I guess his body's made Yale before this—maybe you passed it on the way up." Here Mr. Way snorted; turning to Dan, "You can see how I'm fixed, mister—a ferry ain't no charitable institution; no sir, not in this country!"

He sat on a log, and regarded the rushing Fraser with apparent disgust. Ma was furious. After straddling a mule

for eight hours with her calves showing she felt defeminised. Now she was easing her stiff legs. Young Harper, his eyes full of mirth, had lit his new pipe and was picking wild flowers with Mary. The mules were cropping, and a sort of enormous silence enveloped them all till Dan came over to Marta and said:—

“Suppose I lend Sam the money till we get in?”

Marta shook her head. “Don’t you put up a cent—things’ll straighten out—it’s often like this with Sam.” Then to Mr. Hawkins, “Well, old timer, how about it?”

“Jim!” pleaded Mr. Hawkins desperately, “fact is I owed some money in Yale, couldn’t get out otherwise, that left me short. Now I’ve got whiskey, powder, Epsom salts, an’ no time to lose.”

“Epsom! the real article?” Mr. Way’s eyes narrowed.

“Sure! and the labels ain’t broke; it’s for Doc Flattery in Richfield—rush order; things is kind of hung up without ’em, an’ the boys’ll skin me alive if I don’t deliver the goods. The powder an’ whiskey ain’t so important.”

Mr. Way hesitated, looked thoughtful. “Sam, to tell the truth my stomach’s been acting up terrible—you’ll understand, ma’am, what that does to anyone’s nature—and I’m in need right now, so if you’ll take your chance with Doc Flattery, an’ bust open one of them cases—why—”

Mr. Hawkins acted promptly; in no time at all the contents of three slips of blue paper and three of white were tilted into a cup of spring water. Mr. Way’s features contorted as it went down, then lighted with a sort of startled expectancy:—

“Sam,” he choked, “come inside here a minute; I guess we can fix it up.”

* * *

On crawled the pack train through ribbed chasms, round hairpin bends where each hung for a moment alone over a giddy abyss, then swerved into some sharp rift in the

mountain side: Far below they could see Siwash spearing salmon, hanging the split fish—they looked like pale fronds of red fern—to dry under brush-covered frames: on past Boston Bar, now forty feet deep in the yellow flood; on where the trail glued itself to the jutting face of Nicaragua Rock, on up the breathless slope of Jackass Hill.

Sam's outfit was never alone, it was part of a hardfisted crusade that Ma was pleased to find mostly American; it spoke in tongues they understood, and the talk took her back to the days when Dan's soft-eyed oxen braved the western plains. It was a brotherhood of age and youth, of weakness and strength; at night they watched its camp fires strung along the Fraser canyons like fireflies pinned to a great purple wall. It was part of a human caterpillar four hundred miles long that laughed and cursed and cheered and toiled, and humped itself over ridges, and sagged through valleys, all in motion at the same time, and if one section halted the whole procession was held up. Its head was constantly dissolving on Williams Creek, its tail just as constantly fed from the swirling mob at Yale, so it never lengthened or shortened, and was always measured by the Cariboo Trail. Next night it would still be there, the same yet not the same, with other invisible humans squatting by their firefly fires, and Ma Bowers thought it was all something like life, for you knew where it started, but had no idea how it would end.

She needed food for her mind. She'd try to talk to Dan about this and other things that struck her, but never got far; he'd just listen; he wasn't interested, being too infected by the gold fever. He'd heard a lot, he'd imagine more, and picture what he expected to find.

"Mother," he said, one night after supper, "you saw those fellows I was speaking with at noon?"

"Yes."

"That's Bill Adams and his partner; they work four claims on Upper Williams. Last fall they wanted to spend

the winter outside, an' washed some stuff for expenses. What d'you suppose they got?"

"Let's see—gracious! how could I tell—say, fifty dollars?"

"Fifteen hundred in one pan," he said triumphantly as though he'd done it himself, "they picked it out with a knife."

"Dan, it isn't true!"

"It's a fact; but Adams says there's claims you can buy for fifty dollars, same price as a pair of boots, but they're empty as the boots."

"You've got to be mighty careful when we get there. Dan, I can't get Mary out of my head. She's so quiet lately. It ain't like her."

"She's thinking about that adopted son of yours."

"I guess so, but it won't last—they're just babes in the wood."

"She'll forget him when we strike Richfield. Two thousand men there to-day."

"Maybe, I don't know. Dan, with things as they are, shouldn't we tell her—you know—"

"Oh that!"

"It wasn't so important back on Telegraph Hill where she was right under my eye, but up here is different. She's a woman now."

"Yes, maybe."

"Well, hasn't she got the right to know who she rightly is?"

Dan nodded. "Sure if you put it that way. But how—"

He broke off: they were both picturing what happened nineteen years ago in Ohio when Mary's father, Stephen Bowers, who was Dan's wastrel cousin, fled just a short hour ahead of the sheriff and a search warrant for murder. A week later his young wife, dying of birth fever, put her child into Ma's arms. Those arms had been round her ever since. Mary knew nothing of this, nor could she have guessed the truth by any sign or word in all these years.

"Do you reckon that old warrant for Steve is still good?" asked Ma.

"What's the use of talking like that? They told us he was shot years ago."

"Dan, supposing we're just fooling ourselves, and Steve is alive right now."

"Forget it! Dan got restive. What's ailing you, mother?"

"I don't know. I feel like we're on the edge of something, but I can't figure it out."

"Well," said he, "I guess there's enough to keep us busy as it is. Why start looking for trouble?"

"Maybe, Dan—maybe, but what's our duty? I've got principles."

This made him grin. "Sure you have, but a person has to watch out their principles don't mix things up for other folks. I wouldn't say a word."

Ma was surprised at his sagacity, gave him a sharp glance.

"There's things about her I don't follow, I guess that's her father's blood. I reckon she's in love with that boy right now."

Dan shrugged; he couldn't feel that this was of much moment, and looked across at Mary who sat by herself, knees doubled up, gazing into the fire, her expression unreadable. Marta and young Harper were talking, he telling nothing about himself—they knew no more now than on the very first day—but describing Kent and the Dover Road and Canterbury and the tomb of the Black Prince, which stirred much in Ma but didn't seem to interest Mary. Then she beckoned, and the girl came over and sat between them.

"Talking about me, weren't you, Pa?"

"Yes, a little."

"Well?"

"It wasn't anything special. Enjoying yourself—this anything like what you expected?"

Cariboo Road

"I don't feel like talking to-night, Pa."

"All right, daughter, all right."

Ma lay awake a long time; along the canyon walls the firefly fires began to blink out. Soon the caterpillar slumbered. Dan had struck some other Argonauts, they were packing out gold, and he drank in tales of the Phoenix, Reed, Wilson, Dutch Bill, all in rich pay. The Cariboo reckoned to produce four million before the snow flew, Scotch Jenny was building a new hotel, Sam Hawkins had stretched out, somnolent, content—the whiskey he carried was in small, stout flasks bound with thin iron hoops, and the middle one might be shifted half an inch for a gimlet hole, then be shoved back with no fear of detection. This kept him in a condition of amiable incompetence.

Presently the firefly fires were all extinguished, and Telegraph Hill seemed a long way off.

* * *

Mr. Hawkins was enlarging on mules: "Mules," he said, "is just mules. You can't get away from 'em."

"Meaning?" asked Dan.

"I was brought up with 'em. Mules ain't subject to argument—ever notice that?"

"Sure I have."

"Then why?"

"Well, sir, I never got that far."

"Reason I make it is they don't get any domestic life."

"A mule never struck me as wanting a domestic life," said Mr. Bowers, "they aren't built that way."

"You don't follow me. Mules can't breed mules."

"Sure they can't, but what about it?"

"It's this way—get a male ass with a mare or a she ass with a stallion, an' there's something doing; but with a brace of mules—no, sir—not a thing—no home life at all."

"You're telling me something I know already."

"Well, sir, don't that make a mule—any mule, lady or gent—feel kind of resentful and done out of something or other? Now look at that!"

Unrest was suddenly spreading in the pack train, and Dan stared at the peculiar attitude of the bell mare; nearing a bend, she had squatted in the exact centre of the trail, forefeet splayed out, neck stretched, ears flat back so that her skull seemed naked. The leading packer jumped forward. He could do nothing with her. A quiver ran through the train; every beast developed the same symptoms, passengers were spilled, order was now disorder; now the mare gave a braying scream that echoed along the canyon wall, and Mr. Hawkin's horrified gaze fixed on something that chilled his blood.

"Oh Judas Priest!"

Outlined against the sky, preceded by the familiar figure of Mr. Frank Laumeister, was silhouetted the python-like head and long, reptilian neck of a camel; then, majestically, six more. With them wafted an odour all their own.

Insurrection broke out; the Bowers and Marta flattened themselves against the cliff; young Harper sat, rocking with laughter; the second mule stood on two feet, overbalanced, toppled towards the Fraser with four ten-gallon kegs of Scotch whiskey; followed other assortments of gunpowder and Epsom salts; the train was decimated; there ascended the sound of small timber crashing, the aroma of strong liquor. The rear mules had pivoted, heading for Spuzzum, only to be halted by the next train that followed; the rout was complete, Mr. Hawkins in a state of frenzy, while Mr. Laumeister regarded the scene with the placidity of his own camels.

"Say," yelled Mr. Hawkins, "get them darn brutes out of here—get 'em out quick—what do you mean by it!"

"Whose trail is this, Sam, anyway?"

"It's for all concerned—but them camels—"

"Have as much right here as them mules," retorted Mr.

Cariboo Road

Laumeister, "there's no law against camels in B.C. that I know of."

"There will be," foamed Sam, "you reverse 'em right now."

"Those camels is friendly, Sam; this one's the Queen of Sheba."

"Call her anything you like—get her out of here."

Mr. Laumeister shook his head: "Right astern is the Shah of Persia, there's a kind of understanding between 'em; an' you can't reverse any eight-foot camel on a four-foot trail; try that an' see—you just try it!"

Thus goaded, Mr. Hawkins advanced warily, when the Queen, making a deep hissing sound like escaping steam, laid back her ears.

"They're yours, not mine; I ain't reversing any mules either."

"Kind of reversed themselves, ain't they? but those camels—"

"Stink like hell and you know it; they've no right here; what's more I've got passengers—ladies, an' you darn near broke their necks; they'll swear to that in court, won't you, ma'am?"

Mr. Laumeister's brows went up, he shot an apologetic glance at Ma, took off his hat. "I guess I've seen you before on the *Brother Jonathan*."

"The Queen of Sheba ate my hat," put in Mary hotly, "now you block the trail."

"I was certainly sorry about that, miss, but the Queen's kind of uncertain. It'd be a pleasure to get you another any day."

"Mr. Laumeister," snapped Ma, averting her eyes from the abyss at her feet, "how long do you reckon to keep us here—we aim to move on."

"Well, ma'am that's hard to say with Sam so unreasonable, but—"

"What kind of a country is this anyway?"

"Best in the world except the U.S.A. Strangers welcome."

Ma gave a snort, "You going to stand for this, Dan? I ain't."

Suddenly Mr. Hawkins made a thick, choking sound, threw his hat down, jumped on it, advanced: "You turn them brutes, or—"

"Easy, Sam, easy! What's the trouble here?"

A man was coming up the trail, walking fast; he had a strong body and brown beard, a moustache that flowed smoothly into it; his eyes were large and brown; he had a kind face that expressed a sort of Olympian calm, and was at the same time the friendliest looking person. Ma hadn't seen anyone just like him for a long time and he gave her a sense of relief, especially when Sam wiped his mouth on the back of his hand as though he were going in to supper, picked up his hat sheepishly, and said: "Why, good day, Judge, good day, sir," and all at once all was as peaceable as possible.

The stranger smiled at the women, but didn't speak to them yet; he walked right up to the Queen, then glanced up and down the trail, and over the edge at the ruin below, and gave a deep rich laugh with the sweat running off his face. He stood there laughing and laughing, mopping his eyes with a big kerchief. Presently he said:

"You're holding up traffic, boys."

Mr. Laumeister shook his head. So did Sam. They began to argue again while the bell mare brayed at the Queen of Sheba and she hissed back. Ma and the others waited, for something was sure to happen now. Then the Judge took a hard look at the Queen:—

"There's a lot of men on the move to-day."

"Which ain't my fault," said Mr. Laumeister, "I guess this is a free country."

"That's so," said the Judge. "You're both free to do

what I tell you." Then he looked down the sidehill. "What's that white stuff—sugar?"

Sam told him, "No, that's Epsom salts—rush order for Doc Flattery on Williams Creek."

At this the Judge started laughing again; there was something infectious about it so that Sam and Frank started to laugh too and the Queen of Sheba and the bell mare joined in. You never saw such a change in so short a time. Ma and Mary and Marta, who were pretty sore behind because they'd all landed hard, began to laugh too. It was one of those things that take the edge off a hard trip.

The Judge went to the edge and leaned over.

"Sam, those mules aren't hurt, they're grazing right now. We'll get 'em up."

"I guess you're right, sir," said Sam, "'tain't as bad as I thought."

"Nothing ever is! Now Frank, you keep a packer well ahead of you for the rest of the way out—understand?"

"Sure, Judge, I'll do that."

"Sam!"

"Yes, sir."

"You turn back to that gully where the big cedar is and get your mules up wind from these quadrupeds of Frank's. Is that clear?"

"You leave that to me, sir," said Sam.

The Judge nodded, "I'll camp with you to-night." Then when things began to straighten out and when they'd hauled up the mules, he shook hands with the Bowers; he knew Marta at once and was so nice to her that right then and there Ma changed her mind about Hurdies in general. Also he'd heard about young Harper's trip down the Fraser, and was glad to find him on the way in.

The Bowers never forgot that night—there was the Judge sitting with a flicker of flame on his brown beard; a sort of circle formed round him after supper. For once Sam didn't use his gimlet. When the mules were fed and

hobbled, the packers joined in. The Judge wasn't so big as one first thought, but he looked big, every movement was that of strength. His voice was deep and easy; he seemed interested in them all, and about the Cariboo rush he said:

"About two-thirds of those in here to-day are Americans. We need you people. We can't develop the country without you." Then he added, "Fact is many of your folks seem to like our laws better than their own."

"There certainly wasn't much law where we came from," said Dan, "that's why the Vigilantes took hold."

"You're from Frisco."

"That's right, Judge," nodded Ma; "we lived just outside Stanleytown."

"Well, ma'am, you won't find any Stanleytown here—I can promise you that."

"That's what Miss Zeiss told us."

He laughed. "Thanks, Marta. Miss Zeiss and I are old friends, Mrs. Bowers."

"That's because you don't dance, Judge," said she.

They all laughed at that—then he added: "She's a real pioneer—like yourselves."

That pleased Marta, she looked happy and gave him a straight honest glance that anyone could understand, and Ma began to realise what he meant to all sorts of people in this new strange land. She hadn't met anyone like him before and the way he had just straightened things out on the trail—his good-natured authority and reasonableness—all this made her hope they'd see a lot more of him after they got inside.

"Mr. Bowers," he asked, "are you a forty-niner?"

"No, sir, but we followed a few years after."

"Do any gold washing in California?"

"Some on the Sacramento; but it didn't pan out."

"A good many thousand men were kicking their heels on the California Coast when gold was struck over here on

Fraser four years ago. They made for Canada hot foot."

"Yes, sir, we saw all that, but this year there's a regular—"

"I know what you're going to say. Before the snow flies I believe there'll be six thousand men within gun shot of Williams Creek."

"Six thousand," breathed Ma.

"Yes, Mrs. Bowers—and still more next year, and what very few of them understand is that the gold won't last."

Dan looked at him blankly, "What's that?"

"Well, can it? This year the Cariboo should ship about four million. Let's double it for next year. Say 8,000 men are in then. Divide it up evenly—that's a thousand dollars a man for a year's tough work."

"It ain't much, sir!"

"No, and it's more likely to be ten thousand apiece for 800 men—or one hundred thousand each for 80—just 80. You follow me?"

Dan did follow—and he didn't like it; he looked glum; he shot a glance at Ma who had her lips compressed and stared at the Judge weighing every word he spoke.

"I guess you're right, sir," she said, "but that don't disturb Dan or me. It couldn't be any other way, could it?"

"There's the right spirit. Now tell me what you three did before you started for Canada."

This gave Ma the opening she wanted. She told all of it, making a much better story than she realised, and the Judge gave an approving nod.

"You people are more than welcome to Canada. Later on you'll settle down and grow things again—that's what really counts."

Dan looked unimpressed. "How long do you reckon this field will hold out?"

"There is no answer to that, Mr. Bowers. It stands to reason that the more you take out the less there is left."

"The diggings are kind of spotty?"

"I don't believe Nature has any rules about placer gold. Very often it's not where you expect it, and again her shelves are loaded in the most unlikely spots. But you seekers are the real pathfinders."

There was a little silence after that; to Dan this verdict was not very comforting. Then the Judge went on:—

"This Cariboo Road—you have seen the beginning of it—will make a lot of difference: bull teams into Williams instead of Indian ponies, or"—here he smiled—"or camels; freight twenty cents a pound instead of sixty; stage-coach Richfield to Yale—that's less than a week instead of forty days."

"When will the road be through?" asked Ma.

"I hope next fall."

"But, Judge, what good will the road do if the diggings play out?"

"It will go on—on—somewhere else. You know, Mrs. Bowers, I can imagine thousands of your people and ours travelling this way in years to come just because there is a road, all heading for something we haven't dreamed of yet."

"Speaking of roads," Sam threw a stick on the fire, "business won't be so good for Michael Trupp when this one gets through."

"I think not. Ever hear of that gentleman, Mr. Bowers?"

"No, sir."

"He's our one and only real bandit—that is, so far. On business occasions he wears a black mask; when not on business I believe he circulates quite freely."

Young Harper who had been lying flat, saying nothing, sat up straight.

"What does he look like, sir?"

"That I cannot tell you. None of his victims have seen him without the mask."

"Is he active right now?" asked Ma.

"He was last year till the freeze-up; now his working

Cariboo Road

season is just beginning. It's a difficult case. I may have seen him myself, even talked with him, but there's no clue to his identity."

"Then you might meet him to-morrow and not know it," put in Harper.

"Quite true. All we know is that he is of average size, lightly built, and moves very quickly—which doesn't take one far. I am certain that he has been in and out of Richfield. Marta, you may have danced with him."

Marta laughed. "That's right, too, Judge. If so I missed something good."

"Good!" exclaimed Ma.

The Judge nodded. "Mr. Trupp is wanted for murder and robbery. The reward is two thousand dollars, dead or alive."

"Dead preferred," ruminated Sam.

"Four hundred pounds," breathed young Harper, "that's a bit of money."

The Judge said with a smile, "It is, but I wouldn't tackle it if I were you. Trupp seeking, so far, is even less profitable than gold seeking."

The boy flushed; he caught Marta's glance; she shook her head in a sort of motherly fashion whereat he sent her a sheepish grin. Then as though the subject of Michael Trupp had given them all something to think about, the talk faded away; they heard just the putter of fire and dominant voice of the Fraser far below.

Night closed in. Marta and Mary, sharing blankets, were asleep; Sam had joined his packers near the hobbled mules; young Harper had taken a turn up the trail with Dan to see what lay ahead, and Ma sat with the Judge talking at random. But underneath the talk she was troubled by a strange unaccountable notion that, somehow, had something to do with Michael Trupp who might at this very moment be an unsuspected member of the human caterpillar that stretched itself along the canyon wall. "How

queer," she reflected, "to be free to move about like this, eyes and ears open, and select one's next victim."

"If there's four millions coming out this year, Judge, how about that bandit?" she hazarded.

"Mounted escort—armed convoy—the first should start from Richfield any day; you'll meet them, Mrs. Bowers—meantime no man who is not carrying gold need fear Michael Trupp." He paused, put his hand to his ear, "What's that, wheels?"

"Nothing on wheels this side of Yale, is there?"

"I think you're wrong."

There was silence, then a dry crunch, and in the half light appeared two men at a crawl. Each grasped a pair of short shafts. They were yoked to the shafts by a sort of halter traces, broad where it passed over the shoulders and behind the neck. Between them revolved, very slowly, a single large narrow-rimmed wheel, five feet in diameter. This rotated in a framework, with a shelf on either side. Stuffed sacks were lashed there, and from the frame hung a kettle, frying pan and tin pail. The thing rocked as it came abreast, and from the shafts dropped a pair of hinged legs so that it still stood upright.

"You people mind if we rest here awhile?" The rear man breathed deeply, filling his lungs, voiding them with a gust; he was short, with a barrel chest and bright eyes.

"Certainly," said the Judge, "make yourselves at home." He threw wood on the fire, "The water's boiling now."

"That's good—that's good," the stranger mopped a streaming face, ran a finger round his soaked collar. "Come on, George, take a spell, take a couple of hours anyway."

The other man came forward; he saw Ma, touched his hat. He was tall, thin, with long loose legs and arms, hollow cheeks fringed by a fair beard. He sat limply, then lay flat on his back, hands linked behind his neck.

Cariboo Road

"I'm John Donald from Boston," volunteered the short man, "speak up, George."

"George Barrett from Charleston, South Carolina," said the other in a soft breathless tone, "and certainly glad to make your acquaintance." He shut his eyes and looked so like death that Ma could not reply.

Donald, moving very quietly, unhooked the kettle, made tea. Doing this he would look round noting the sleepers one by one, dwelling longest on the Judge's face, but he did not speak at all till the tea was ready.

"Here, George, this'll fix you up; only 350 miles now, maybe not that much."

Barrett took it with a sucking sound, wiped his moustache and lay flat again, then Donald came back to the fire and sat drinking slowly while he stared into the red coals. The two girls, now awake, looked at him, at each other; Ma's eyes caught those of the Judge, and she made a gesture; the Judge had an expression of understanding compassion.

"Two reasons we travel mostly by night," said Donald, "there's fewer flies and nothing right on the trail to speak of—we got tired of pulling out to let other folks pass. Long way from here to Manasses, eh, George?"

"Manasses?" asked Ma.

"Yes, ma'am, that's where we first met—shooting at each other."

"Still thinks he can shoot too," said Barrett wearily—he was lying on his side now—"never could and never will."

"But why on earth do that!" she exclaimed.

"Well, ma'am, it was like this: George held one end of a stone bridge over a creek, I had the other—it was the battle of Bull Run; just about a year ago, but it seems longer."

"Were you two there?"

"For a while," Barrett was sitting up while the fire painted a false glow on his hollow cheeks, "till we put those Yanks on the skedaddle; I could have walked right into Washington next day if I'd a mind to."

"Then why didn't you?"

"Well," here he sent the other man a glance of pure affection, "fact is the Federals got there first, and I was too full of holes to feel like walking. About the middle of that afternoon Beauregard and Jackson came along, and the Yanks were licked."

"It wasn't a licking but a masterly retreat," grunted Donald.

"Anyway, about sundown when we had the bridge to ourselves Jack said to me, 'Look here, Reb, how do you feel about secession?' and I said, 'Not a thing;' 'Same here,' said he, 'and I take it we're not set on killing each other either.'"

"That's it," nodded Donald, "it was like that."

"Then he asked me if I'd ever heard of gold on the Fraser River in Canada, and we slept alongside each other that night. Nobody missed us!"

"How did you reach B.C.?" asked the Judge.

"Driving bull teams across the prairie to Frisco, sir, that's how we made it. When we struck Yale we fixed up the two-man barrow, and hit the trail. My end is Reb, his Federal, but they hang together."

"Are you miners?"

"No, sir."

"Then why—"

"We reckon to pick that up later on. I was schoolteaching in Charleston, and Mr. Donald, he's a tailor, so if we don't strike it rich there's bound to be clothes made and children taught most anywhere."

When he said that he coughed, put his hand to his chest, gave a courtly little nod that seemed to embrace all and subsided; this time he was really asleep. Donald pulled a ragged blanket from a sack and laid it over him.

"George is like that," he said in a low tone, "drops off at most any time, and I've got to let him, so we stop pretty often. I'm kind of worried; he don't fancy his food any

Cariboo Road

more, and he talks with his eyes shut; see him stripped and he's all bones. I'll certainly be glad when we get through."

"And then?" said Ma softly.

"Well, ma'am, we'll just face up to whatever we find—or don't. I guess there's enough gold left to go round."

"Can't we do something? Couldn't my Dan help and the young fellow that's with us—they're tired of riding mules."

"No—thanking you kindly—we don't need help; the barrow is all right. Of course I have to lean backward on the breeching going down hill, and George isn't hefty enough to do much pulling, though he can't realise that. We take it easy in spells. All George needs is to pick up his first nugget, his first chunk of gold, and if you'll excuse me, folks, I'll take a few winks myself till he wakes up."

With this he moved off and lay down under a tree close to Barrett. Watching the two, Ma's eyes grew moist; the Judge had opened his sleeping bag, had let himself into it; next day he was pushing ahead. He'd reach the Cariboo long before they did, but made her promise to report their arrival, when he'd do anything he could for them.

Presently Dan came back with young Harper. Ma told them in a low voice while they stared at the barrow.

"We've got to help," said Dan.

"You can't. Nobody can, it's all written. Just let 'em sleep."

"Time you slept too, mother; it's been a tough day."

"Not yet, Dan; it does me good to rest just like this. I'm—I'm pretty busy," she added.

He knew her too well to object. "Don't sit up all night."

"I won't. You two take your rest. Now go on—"

She said nothing more, nor did she look at him as he stepped off into the shadows and left her sitting with her eyes fixed on the crazy barrow. It stood clear in the moonlight, frail, flimsy like the consumptive who took the front shafts. He would never make the Cariboo. The Judge

had seen that too, but what could anyone do about it?

Half an hour later Barrett got up—he seemed to get up by degrees—and touched Donald's shoulder. Donald woke with a start, rubbed his eyes, stretched himself, hung the kettle back on the frame.

They both moved so quietly that the camp slept on—all except Ma.

"You'll excuse me, ma'am," said Barrett in a ghost of a voice, "I didn't mean to drop off like that."

"Don't start now—you ain't fit."

"There's no time to lose or the country'll be all staked. We're just a shade behind time as it is. You spending this year on Williams?"

"Sure, if all goes well."

"Then I admire your courage. Maybe we could drop in some evening for a visit; we'd appreciate that."

"Of course." Her heart was torn with pity, the man was doomed, she'd never see him again. "Come often, bring any clothes that need mending; always glad to have you."

"Thanks, but there won't be any, Mr. Donald being a tailor. Northerners, aren't you?"

"From Ohio."

"Well," he smiled, "there's no difference—really. So long, ma'am; you'll be passing us to-morrow without knowing it: it's been nice to find folks like you right by the roadside. See you in the Cariboo."

He gave her a short half bow, Donald sent one eloquent glance signalling that he knew she knew, though he hadn't told her, and she'd understood why he hadn't; then the barrow got into slow motion with a creaky lurch. It was obvious that Barrett's strength was gone, he held the shafts loosely instead of pulling. He was steadied, guided by them, yoked to a mad contrivance of his own devising, while Donald, gripping firmly, curved his powerful back and did all the propelling.

The barrow had them: they were chained to it.

3

The Golden Cariboo

ON crawled the caterpillar out of the Fraser canyon to the cold, emerald stream of the Thompson; on over sunbaked hills with patches of bunch grass where the air was as filled with luminous dust raised by herds of cattle driven across the line, slow-moving herds that lifted bellowing complaints and cut a wide, close-cropped swathe to mark their passage. At times the trail was choked with men, mules and bullocks, and thus might have journeyed the tribes of Israel. On up the Buonaparte Creek, up the long, breathless pull of Clinton Hill into the suave silence of green timber where pasture was hard of finding, and so by Keithley and the Forks of the Quesnel to the golden Williams. Thirty-two days from Yale!

Three miles out of Richfield Sam halted the train beside Jack of Clubs Lake because the water was better there than in Williams Creek where it had been diverted through a hundred sluices, converted to yellow soup. The travellers were resting in the thin shade of a bunch of jack pine when young Harper jumped up as though a spring had gone off inside him, got red in the face, and said:—

“Mrs. Bowers, you and Mr. Bowers have been so kind that I don’t know how to thank you.”

“Why, Harry, that’s nothing at all.”

“It’s a lot, and I’ll never forget it—never; it couldn’t have happened in England. Now I’m going to push on—you’ve enough to look after—and I’ll repay that hundred the first possible minute.”

“You forget all about it.”

"I couldn't, ever; it's my first job. Till then—good-bye."

There was something so definite and earnest about him that she made no protest.

"That's all right—we'll be glad to see you any time, and all kinds of luck."

"I'm getting along too," said Marta, "it's best I go straight to Scotch Jenny, and fix up something for you—that's better'n you folks trailing round Richfield hunting for shelter. I'd take your time if I was you. It's certainly been one good trip in spite of the camels, and you people being on it made all the difference. See you later."

Then young Harper shook hands very formally all round; he looked oddly at Mary and said, "So long, see you again soon," and walked off whistling beside Marta who kept to her mule; they vanished round the next bend, and Dan went back to help Sam.

"How about him, daughter?"

"Who, Ma?"

"That Harper boy: you've been a lot together these last few weeks. I'm interested—I want to know."

"He's different."

"Sure, but how different? been making love to you?"

"No, not ever. I often wish he had."

Ma gave a sniff, "It's to his credit he didn't: fond of him?"

"I'm going to be; I just can't help it."

"That's because there was no one else."

"No," said the girl with a sort of violence, "it isn't; he never even kissed me, not once, though often I wanted him to. He makes me think of a lot of things I never thought of before."

"Go on."

"He's young, younger than me in some ways, then he'll come out with something that makes me feel like a child: once or twice just when I thought he was going to get

loving, he only laughed; I couldn't tell whether it was at me or himself. Oh, I think I hate him. Do you suppose we'll see him often?"

"Not so often. There's over four thousand men here right now, and you and I are going to be kept mighty busy keeping to ourselves; we've got to make a home from the ground up, and there's not much to make it with."

"Home! A home here!"

"Sure. We're in for a tough time, daughter, and don't you forget it. It'll be a sight harder than Telegraph Hill too. You scared?"

"No, I'm not scared. Ma, why did he go off like that?"

"Glad he did—shows the man in him."

"I thought he'd stay with us."

"No, he didn't want anyone to deliver him right on the gold fields. We've enough looking after your Pa. You just keep hold of yourself."

"He's my best friend, Ma. I'm not going to lose him either."

Ma turned on her. "Look here, daughter, you and I are going to be more alone than ever before in our lives: you haven't any idea of it so I'm trying to tell you."

"Then why can't Harry live with—"

"Not on your life. For God's sake have a little sense."

Mary blinked at her. "What about Marta—she's gone too."

"That'll take care of yourself. Marta may be all right—I guess she is—but a dancing girl is no company for you. We're obligated—of course we are—but will you just leave that to me."

"And Mr. Flint—what about him?"

"Well," Mrs. Bowers hesitated a little, "we'll be friends but that's all—just friends. I'm not forgetting what they did—both of 'em—but the least said the soonest mended. The Bowers are going to hold together."

"Ma, why did you ever sell out?"

"You'll know that when you get a man of your own—to-day I ain't quite so sure. And, before Dan gets back, there's something else."

"You've said a lot already."

"Well—better get this too. You'll be surprised. It's about me. I'm not reckoning that much will come of this trip, and—"

"Then I don't—"

"You listen to me. Dan don't know how I feel—and he mustn't ever. I'll lie like anything if I have to so that he don't get downhearted, but I'm a pretty poor liar and that's where you've got to back me up. Understand? There he is now."

Dan came back, eager, excited, smiling. "Sam's stopping for the night; says he's got to get some Jack of Clubs water into those kegs before he strikes Richfield. Know what day this is?"

"No, I've lost count."

"Fourth of July! They're celebrating on Williams; I heard rifle shooting a while ago. Sam says he'll have our stuff in early to-morrow, so we'll get on. Suit you, mother?"

The trail was wider here, had widened to a road with wheel marks; they began to pass scattered cabins, patches of burned bush, clearings with piles of cordwood, scaffolds for whipsawing lumber. The road followed the lakeshore till it turned east beside the broad bed of a creek, a stretch of boulders and gravel with a muddy stream in the centre; it bristled with square posts yellow in the sun; picks, shovels, iron bars lay about; there were log shacks, and the creek ran between steeply rounded hills with a growth of lodge-pole pine. Westward the stream lost itself in a wide meadow of wild hay, eastward a narrow vertically walled canyon beyond which nothing was visible. Only a few men were in sight.

"Lower Williams," said Dan, waving. "Richfield's higher up above the canyon where the good stuff is; every-

Cariboo Road

thing staked here, Sam says, a heap of work done, but nothing struck yet."

"Why?" asked Ma, her lips tightening.

"They've lost the old creek bed. There's Billy Barker's shafthouse—he's going to sink right down till he hits something. Sam says he's crazy, and about broke. What's the matter, mother?"

"Nothing, Dan, nothing," she felt a little sick, "just shows you've got to be careful, eh? What's that ahead?"

A horse, led by a man, and drawing a cart, had turned out of the bush; it blocked the road. On the cart was lashed a varnished coffin with rawhide loops for handles; it glistened in the sun; behind walked a second man, tall, elderly, bald, with a long grey beard. He had long arms, he wore a long, black coat, ragged at the edges.

"Some poor prospector gone to his rest," breathed Ma, full of sympathy. "Dan, take off your hat."

The cart—it had been built with an axe—lumbered on; the man in the lead murmured affectionately to his horse; the other had his naked head thrust forward like a vulture. Presently he looked round, making a gesture that gathered the Bowers into his train.

"Let her go, Oliver."

Presently they reached a cabin, the door swung open, above it a white painted board:—

J. KNOTT. UNDERTAKER AND OTHER ODD JOBS. WOOD
TOMBSTONES IN STOCK. QUICK SERVICE.

The old man halted, ran his eyes over the three, seemed interested; they saw that his face was lined. He gave Dan a nod.

"Obliged if you'd give us a hand—easy now—don't scratch her."

The casket was heavy; it had a nameplate of sheet copper, but Dan could not read what was there. He helped to carry the thing in to be set in a corner on a pair of trestles. The undertaker seemed satisfied, rubbed his lean hands.

"What's your names, stranger?"

Dan told him.

He took out a notebook, a stub pencil, and began to write. "Name, age, place of birth; I guess I'll put your height in too—in the midst of life we are in death."

"Look here," expostulated Ma, "we don't need any attention."

"Maybe not right now, but this saves trouble later on. You don't look your age, ma'am—thanks."

"Dan, we'll be moving along now."

"What's your hurry? Meet Mr. Oliver d'Orpigny, old timer; I'm Johnny Knott, and business isn't too good either."

"You cut them caskets too short," interjected Mr. d'Orpigny, "that's why the boys'd sooner do without them."

"Lumber's expensive, Oliver; I cut 'em to half a standard length and no more—makes 'em six feet; if a client runs over that he's just got to fit. Have a cup of tea, ladies?"

"Thanks just the same," quivered Ma, eyeing the coffin, "but—"

He gave a sort of cackle, struck a match on his thigh and put it to some brush laid ready on the hearth.

The cabin was new, substantial, with a hard mud floor, clay-jointed stone fireplace, and chairs made from barrels; the barrels were cut to an easy curve, stuffed with meadow hay, upholstered with flour sacks. Then he lifted the hinged lid of the coffin.

Ma, averting her gaze, heard a hoot of laughter from Dan.

The thing was lined with coarse red felt held down by brassheaded tacks, there was a small blue velvet cushion at one end; it was filled with tinned stuff, table ware, pots and carpenter's tools all neatly arranged.

Her head began to swim as Mr. Knott, ignoring the tense silence around him, picked out a canister of tea.

"Kind of comfortable, eh? It's mine. You folks just struck the Cariboo?"

Ma could only nod.

"Pleased we ran into each other, ma'am."

"Is it your first day in this shack?"

"Yep—and you're the first ladies that's crossed my doorstep since I don't know when."

"And we're certainly pleased to be here, Mr. Knott."

"Say, Oliver, don't you want any tea?"

"I guess not, Johnny; Barnee's kind of restless. So long."

Mr. Knott gave a grin, "He's dead set on that horse; sleeps alongside in the hay, keeps his pepper an' salt right in the manger." He chuckled to himself, hanging the kettle on an iron arm to swing over the fire.

It was all so real—yet unreal—that Ma felt mesmerized. The old man's head ran to a peak, with one curve from his thin shoulder to the top of a shiny skull, yet somehow he had the manner of youth. His eyes, pale blue, held the simplicity of a child, with a fleeting touch of cynicism. He looked wise, with a capacity for transitory wickedness. This made him the more interesting; and he was so hospitable that Ma shut her mind against the vision of a dead prospector being fitted into a casket inches short. Studying the cabin she decided she could well do with one just like it, but larger, with more shelves, and a rocker, and wider windowsills for flowers. Perhaps he would help in the building. This cheered her and she felt a lot better now that they hadn't entered the Cariboo in the wake of a corpse.

"You've a nice place here, Mr. Knott."

"I've seen worse, ma'am."

"Ever do any prospecting yourself?" asked Dan.

Mr. Knott fished about in the coffin, brought out a small buckskin bag that held a nugget the size of a walnut, 'twas sown with little particles of milky quartz: he tossed it over.

"Great! That's great! Where from?"

"The Red Jacket on Upper Williams; I'm partners with Sing—he's Chinese—cooks for Billy Barker's gang; I staked her last year, an' picked that up the very first thing."

Dan fingered the lump with awe. "Pretty rich claim, eh?"

"No, it's the only darn thing we did find. We worked her for a while with nothing doing, then I started boxing up stiffes."

"Oh!"

"It's the only business I know of you don't have to go after! Profits ain't much but the pay is in advance every time. You can't collect from a corpse."

"Is—is there much sickness here?" asked Ma in a quaver.

"Why no, ma'am, not what you'd notice. It's mostly young fellows round thirty or thirty-five that pass out. They're kind of careless."

Dan nodded. "It was that way on the Sacramento."

"You reckon to go prospecting, or buy an interest?"

"I guess I'll look round first."

"Better look more'n once."

Wagging his beard, Mr. Knott regarded them over a tin mug; he liked them, had liked them the minute he saw them, especially the women. So far there were only nine women in the Cariboo—Scotch Jenny, four Hurdies, the two Mrs. Camerons, Julie Picot and Annie Muller, but he didn't count that last pair, and there was something about Ma Bowers with her brave eyes and firm mouth and short sturdy body that warmed his old breast; she looked like a born home-maker, and the girl looked nice too—the cleanest, freshest girl he had set eyes on for a long time.

"You folks oughter get settled first thing," he said.

Dan nodded. "Sure—we're figuring on that."

"There's the Hotel de France—that's Scotch Jenny—for a make-shift at ten dollars a day."

"We can't afford that," said Ma quickly.

"'Tain't no place for ladies anyway. I'd build; I'll give

Cariboo Road

you a hand; Oliver'll pull the logs, he don't charge his friends nothing for Barnee. You folks bring your stuff with you?"

"That's certainly kind of you." She was greatly relieved. "Yes, we brought all we could—blankets, dishes, oh, a lot of stuff, and some grub, enough for three months."

"Saved you about a thousand dollars, ma'am, but things is getting cheaper. Butter's down to one seventy-five a pound."

"A pound!" gasped Mary, "Ma, did you hear that?"

"I wasn't figuring on butter."

"Kind of luxurious, I call it," nodded the old man. "They're giving away candles at a dollar apiece. More tea—?"

"No thanks."

He put the canister back in the coffin, closed the lid with a bang, laid the wet leaves on a plate by the fire to dry, and bit off a chew.

"If I was you I'd build close by here, it's out of the wind, lots of firewood."

"Mr. Knott, that'd be just—"

"Johnny to you, ma'am, to all three of you."

"How about it, Dan?"

Dan looked up; he had only half listened, being too near Williams Creek to think clearly about anything else.

"Suits me to start with; we might have to move if I struck anything, but that'll take care of itself. Much obliged, Johnny; I guess we'll push on now."

"Pushin' where to?"

"Dunno, but we'll find something; see you first thing in the morning. Come on, mother."

Mr. Knott shook his head, "Whoa there, pilgrim; you're staying right here; ladies take the other room. I've got some six-foot stuff cut to length, but it'll make a couple of bunks till—well—it's wanted."

"But what about you?"

"You and me will shake down on the floor where we are. Now let's round up the celebration—some friends of mine I'd like you to meet."

* * *

Ma Bowers had been in her new home for a week; she didn't quite know how it was done, having had little to do with it herself, but it started that first evening when Mr. Knott introduced them to a large number of men, mostly with beards, saying that the Bowers family aimed to get under cover right away, and help would be welcome. They were all polite, and especially glad to know her and Mary, though they hadn't the same interest in Dan, and they'd certainly take a hand putting up the shack.

That first afternoon was something like a triumphal procession through a swirling, swarming crowd. When Ma and Mary came along you'd see a man take another by the arm, jerk him out of the way; you'd see an odd, pleased, sometimes wistful look in their faces. In the middle of it they met Judge Begbie, who was with Doc Flattery; the Doc was thin, with sandy hair and grey eyes. A circle had formed around them. They were laughing about Sam Hawkins, the Epsom salts and the camels. The Judge knew Johnny, and chuckled when the old man said the Bowers thought they'd hit the Cariboo in the tail of a funeral procession. The whole camp knew about that casket larder. The Judge approved the plan that the Bowers should build right away, and said that young Harper must be training to capture Michael Trupp since he'd just won the foot race open to all. It was generally assumed that the bandit was right there enjoying himself with the rest, but no one had ever seen his face, so he was safe enough. Mary kept looking for Harper, but couldn't find him anywhere. There were hours of this in the long, northern evening, it being nearly eleven when the sun went down, and a lot of noise from anvil shooting, which was with a

Cariboo Road

patch of black powder compressed between two anvils from Jack Lennard's forge. Americans were breaking whiskey bottles with long-barrelled Colts, and putting the weight, and wrestling, and tugs of war. Ma got tired out.

Dan had gone off by himself; he walked about Upper Williams from claim to claim, catching smothered voices at shaft bottom on bed-rock, the whine of windlasses: he watched the loaded buckets come up dripping, and the yellow stuff deepening above the shallow riffles. All the sluiceboxes had hinged tops, and could be locked. When the paystreak was extra rich the owners would clean up every day, carry the stuff to their shacks to stow under the bunks, and cart it back again next morning. Dan talked to a lot of them, and when he rejoined the family his eyes were large and wondering like those of a child.

A week later Ma swung slowly in her new rocker—Johnny had seen to that—and looked about with a feeling of thankfulness. The cabin was larger than most; it smelled of clean wood, gum, split cedar shingles; the floor of whipsawed lumber; chips and shavings still lay in the corners. Windows of real glass with short curtains of cheesecloth dyed red that Ma had brought with her, she didn't know why: the sills were extra wide with rows of tomato cans for flower seeds; Mary had painted them light blue like the pattern on the best china plates. Each wall angle had a three-cornered cupboard so not an inch of space was wasted; under the floor a six-foot cellar for fresh meat. Ma ran to copper pots and pans, they were always bright.

The fireplace, five feet wide, had two iron arms for kettles. It took a full stick of cordwood. Above, Dan's rifle rested on two pegs. On a platform outside stood a water-barrel fed by a spring higher up, and a pipe brought water through the wall to a wooden sink that drained to the underlying sand. That was all right till the frost came. A small room for Mary, one larger for Ma and Dan. Rich-

field held nothing more complete, and on that first night when the fire was lighted, and a kerosene lamp in a wall bracket burned bright, Ma drew the curtains, looked around, felt comforted, and began to knit. Things were bound to happen here that one couldn't foresee, but she wasn't afraid.

When Dan came in he was silent, sat for some time cracking his finger joints, forgetting to smoke.

"Where's daughter?"

"Gone to bed, she's tired, she's worked hard. Looks nice, don't it?"

"Fine, just fine; now about things—about prospects."

"Go right ahead, Dan."

"I've seen a lot of fellows this week; I've been over Upper Williams, Antler, Lowhee and Lightning where the good suff is: that's all staked—all of it."

"You reckoned on that, didn't you?"

"I guess so. Also there's men staking claims out in the bush five miles from here where you don't see anything but bluejays; most of 'em will go out in September when the lay-over starts."

"What's that?"

"Sluicboxes begin to freeze up; there's only about four months you can work on the surface; it isn't like California."

"And the other eight?" she was disturbed.

"You see it through here."

"We can't go out, Dan, it costs too much."

"I know that. The woods are full of men hoping to God they'll strike something before the snow flies. Now we're here, and I know more, I've a feeling I ought to have tried it alone the first time."

"You haven't started yet. We've got the best shack in Richfield, plenty of grub, all set to make good. Been talking to Johnny about it?"

"No."

Cariboo Road

"Why don't you?"

"Johnny's done enough already."

"Maybe, but we've done something for him, he's all brisked up since we came: tell him you've got three thousand to buy an interest."

"That's so, but—" he shook his head.

"Ain't we partners?"

"Sure, but this a rich man's camp—three thousand dollars don't take you anywhere. Those four creeks are turning out about forty thousand a day right now; maybe one thousand men at work out of five, the rest scratching gravel for nothing. You can't buy into a good claim for what we've got."

"Do you ride a mule four hundred miles into the Cariboo and not take a chance when you get there?" snapped Ma.

"Eh?"

"You heard me: I'm taking my chances too. So's Mary. Go right ahead, husband! Mary and I'll have plenty on our hands, lots more'n just cooking three meals a day. I can't have any garden, but Lord knows I'm not going to spend next year raising nasturtiums in tin cans; no, sir, not for a minute. Now you get after Johnny, an' ask him. Seen anything of that Harper boy?"

"Not a thing, he'll be out prospecting."

"With the bluejays? Anyway he's nice an' clean an' has spunk; also he's broke."

"He won forty dollars on that foot race."

Ma gave a sniff; went into the next room, opened a tin box.

"There's the forty—he gave it to me next day."

"That's pretty straight. Did he see Mary?"

"Sure he did and she feels a lot better for it. I guess I'd trust him anywhere with our girl. Run into Mr. Flint?"

"Sure. He's just here. Star boarder at the Hotel de France and doing well."

"That where Marta's dancing?"

"Same place—they're open all night—wide open—but nobody carries a gun."

"Seen the Judge?"

"Yes, he's coming round to see you as soon as he gets straightened out."

"That's all right. Now Dan, you fix something up with Johnny on the Red Jacket."

"Remember what he told us that first night?"

"Yes, I do, but from all I hear that claim ought to be—well—you fix it anyway. Better get your hooks into something before it's too late."

"What about yourself?"

"To-morrow I'm going to visit with that Mrs. Cameron—Sophy's her name. She's in poor health."

* * *

The second coat of paint was dry on a white wooden tombstone, and Johnny had just traced '*Sacred to the Memory of*' in spindling letters with tails like the legs of a mosquito, and little curls and curves to give a fancy touch.

When he got this far he had a habit of standing back, brush in hand, cogitating who the client would be: the very man might happen along and glance at the thing with never a notion he was booked to be planted at the foot of it. But to-day Mr. Knott had a stabbing toothache that took the edge off life, and he put a dry hand to his cheek.

"Morning, Johnny, how's things?"

"Things, Dan, ain't so bad except this tooth; she's got to be extricated."

"Sort of neglected 'em, eh? My missus is always after me about that."

"Teeth shouldn't need no attention. How's things with you?"

"Fair, Johnny, just fair; been looking round quite a lot. Say, I've got a proposition."

"Most everyone has, and none of 'em any good—what's yours?"

"It's about the Red Jacket; can we talk business?"

Mr. Knott caressed his jaw. "Dan, do I look in any shape for a proposition?"

"Not right now, but—"

"No, sir! I'm goin' to the dentist. It's the first time in seventy-five years a tooth has laid down on me. Gosh! I hope Jack's there!"

"You don't tell me there's a dentist right here!"

"Come along an' see."

Mr. Lennard was large and perspiring, his sleeves rolled up exposing muscular, grimy arms, one of which gripped a bellows handle; the smithy smelled of grit, grease, sweat and iron: he looked round as they darkened the door, noted the visitor's check.

"S'all right, Johnny; needn't say a word."

"I weren't going to: got time to hoist her out?"

On the wall near the forge hung a coiled length of fishing line, very fine but strong; Mr. Lennard reached for it. "Open her up, old timer."

Mr. Knott opened up, displaying an irregular range of rusty fangs; it was something like the Coast Range with ridges and humps and unexpected valleys revealed after the snow melted. Mr. Lennard ran a blackened forefinger along the few remaining ragged peaks, paused, pressed hard on one of them, and grinned at the old man's contorted features. Next he took a tight turn round the tooth with the fishing line, and made its other end fast to his anvil. Then he laid a horseshoe nail with its point in the red charcoal. Lastly he placed Mr. Knott in a stooping posture facing the anvil with the line taut so that he seemed to be making obeisance to it.

"Care to yank her out yourself, Johnny?"

"I haven't the spunk, an' you know it. Let her go!"

At this Mr. Lennard lounged towards the forge; he picked up the nail with a pair of tongs, then stepped behind his client. Doing this he gave a swift jab at Mr. Knott's rump, when with a howl the long body straightened in a sort of galvanic spasm that tore the tooth from its moorings.

"That's the Cariboo way," mumbled Johnny, spitting blood, "never fails if you get a good holt: thanks, Jack."

Mr. Lennard laughed, hung up the line, "Always ready to oblige. How's things on the Red Jacket?"

Johnny shook his head over that, "Least said soonest mended."

On the way back he took Dan's arm: "What's the proposition?"

Dan said he had three thousand dollars. Johnny wasn't impressed, he opened his mouth—"Much of my jaw carried away?" and Dan said, "Quite a chunk, but she'll fill up some, and as to prospecting I've thought that over—I'd sooner take a chance on buying in somewheres."

"Y'know," croaked Johnny, feeling about inside his mouth, "this takes me back sixty-five years to Vermont where I used to watch my Pa blowing out stumps on the farm: he'd work away with a bar, shove in a wad of black powder, an' hoist her out roots and all with a hell of a jolt, leavin' a hole like a cellar. Strikes me I ain't as many stumps left as I thought—what's that you said?"

"I'd sooner take chances on the Red Jacket than fool round any longer."

"Dan, that claim ain't an asset, she's a liability."

"You're right next door to the Dutch Bill, an' you know what they're getting."

Johnny was feeling a little sick, so they sat on a rock while he nursed his face. You could see Upper Williams where the mountain stream had laid its yellow eggs on the blueblack slate a million years ago, and piled gravel to hide

them; see the shafthouses and heaped dumps; catch the sound of picks and shovels and men's voices rising through the burning air. You could look down on the huddled roofs of Richfield, across to the tree-clad summit of Cow Mountain; there was Eldorado, run to earth by those who followed a sprinkling of precious dust marking their passage with their dead, till at last they won to the golden heart of the Cariboo.

"Dan," said Johnny after a long pause, "I want to get this thing straight. You don't rightly understand about the Red Jacket; certainly the Dutch Bill is next door, but that don't mean a thing. Sitting next to Bill Deitz in the Hotel de France don't make me a millionaire. I've raked that darn gravel bed fore an' aft, but not a thing except the one nugget I showed you. She's a luxury claim."

"What's that?"

"Kind of luxury to own it: 'stead of the claim supporting you, you support the claim—if you follow me."

"How does your partner feel?"

"Sing, he's my partner, feels the same, an' it amuses us both. Whenever we scrape up a couple of hundred we put it in, an' don't reckon to see it again."

"How deep did you go?"

"Hit bedrock with nothing on it."

"There's a lot of others ready to take my money if you don't," said Dan stubbornly, "but my missus told me to talk to you."

"She did!"

"Sure! asked me if I'd rode a mule four hundred miles into the Cariboo, an' hadn't guts enough to take a chance when I got there, an', Johnny, we'd both sooner take it with you than anyone else round here, and that's a fact."

Mr. Knott gave a sigh; he hadn't wanted this, hadn't wanted their money: these folks had a future of some kind, while there was none for him. It couldn't be long before someone else would be planting one of his own tombstones

on his own grave, and—by heck! he'd overlooked this end of it—he had the casket all ready but no tombstone, so right now he'd make one of seasoned wood, give it three coats of white lead instead of two, and work out some kind of inscription for himself.

The more he thought of this the more important it seemed, and he was silent so long that Dan grew restless.

"Is it the Red Jacket—or not?"

"Well, you being so set on losing money might as well drop it there as anywheres else: we'll fix up a third interest; don't give me the cash, hire a couple of fools like yourself, an' spend it in labour. Call it twenty-five hundred for your share," here the old man hesitated, shook his head. He was acting against his own judgment, but couldn't refuse a lady. "But first you take another look round, and if you feel the same, why, all right—but, darn it, don't ever blame me."

Dan laughed, swung off downhill 'for another squint at the Jacket.' Johnny watched him reflectively for a moment before returning to his own cabin; he was oppressed by a feeling of guilt, so stopped for a word with Ma Bowers. She was there with Mary and made him welcome.

"Glad you came in, Johnny; I was just going over to your place. You've seen Dan?"

"Yes, ma'am I have; that's what brought me here."

"Settled about the Red Jacket?"

"I've settled Dan," he said gloomily. "You told him to fix things with me?"

"That's right, I did."

"Well, you can't hold it against me later on: I warned him just as I'm warning you now."

"Don't you worry. Daughter, tell him our plan."

"We want your advice," said Mary, "and—"

"Ain't got any more," protested Mr. Knott, "all cleaned out on advice."

"But, Johnny, listen! this is about Ma and me."

Cariboo Road

"That's worse, a sight worse; 'tain't fair either. I weren't in any way pestered till you folks come along, now I don't get any peace at all. What's the trouble, miss?"

"Well, we've been settled here for a week—that's thanks to you, but we can't sit round just doing nothing. Marta says there's money in being a Hurdy, but I don't want that, and there's no storekeeping job, and I asked Doc Flattery if I could help him and he said no, not till he got a hospital, so naturally we're consulting you."

Mr. Knott clawed his beard: it seemed the entire Bowers family was putting itself in his hands. How and where would it end? Then came inspiration.

"Just wait a minute," he said, and went off; it was but two hundred yards across to his cabin; he returned with an old zincfaced washboard under his arm, stood it by the door.

"That kind of swum into my mind: her name was Bella—one of my clients—"

"She's dead?" asked Ma.

"You ain't a client till you are dead. She was a widow lady before she married up with Bill Hodgekinson. She took in washing, worked hard, didn't take any pleasure in anything else, not even in Bill. He'd been scratching round, an' struck nothing but her, an' was all tired out. So he married her. She was making money at five bucks a dozen, while he needed rest."

"Dan ain't that sort, Johnny."

"I ain't talking about Dan. Well, it didn't work out the way Bill figured; there weren't no honeymoon, an' she was at this washboard afore sunrise seven days out of seven, bangin' round with pails an' tubs an' hot water so you'd think it was a boilershop. She'd keep that up till midnight, so Bill couldn't get rested nohow. Then she passed over kind of sudden—I guess her lungs was all steamed out inside—an' I made her an extry special tomb-

stone, and Bill he wrote out the inscription *Sleep Bella Sleep. In God We Trust*. He's been restin' ever since.

Ma laughed as she had not laughed since she hit the Cariboo. "Go on, Johnny."

"Well, right now there's good money in the laundry business with no competition to speak of. Starch is extry."

"You're a guide straight from heaven," said Mary fervently, "that'll do us fine. Now sit where you are; we'll have some tea."

Mr. Knott shook his bald skull; the day had been full enough, he feared lest more be required of him:—

"Thanking you kindly, miss, but you'll have to excuse this time: I'm sort of down in the mouth. Just lost an old friend."



4

The Judge Takes a Chance

JUDGE BEGBIE was taking his morning walk, he did this regularly, liked the kaleidoscopic scene, and his figure was the best known in Richfield. He would drop in at claim after claim, and talk, and stow everything away in a retentive brain: the kaleidoscope was always turning, always the same yet always different, with winners and losers, hopeful and hopeless. Sometimes he would roam about on Lowhee or Antler, but generally finished near Lower Williams, that waste of boulders and gravel where the yellow eggs were bound to be discovered if only the ancient creek bed was located.

On a morning in August he found Barker sitting glumly alone on the collar of his shaft; one could hear the drip-drip not far beneath him.

"Quit work, Billy?"

Barker shrugged, touched his hat. "The boys caved in last night; can't work on empty bellies."

"As bad as that?"

"Yes, Judge, bad as that: I guess we're finished; not much further to sink, but—"

"Billy, what makes you so certain the stuff is here?"

Barker doubled his horny fists till the knuckles stood up like granite:—

"Look!" he tilted a pan showing a heavy tail of black sand, "it's out of the last bucket; when you're on top of that you're next door to something good; and those cows' tongues," he picked out a smooth oval stone—"and sulphides—it's like steps on a ladder. You know what'll happen?"

"I wish I did."

"I've seen it before lots of times; saw it in Cornwall where they were mining tin; the tin gave out and they quit. Some other fellows come along, put in a few shots for luck and by God! they find copper. It'll be like that. Some darn speculator will take a chance, and pump her out, and go down a few more feet—and strike it. That's what catches us old timers."

"Are you all going out?" asked Begbie thoughtfully.

"That costs a hundred each unless you walk; if winter finds us here, we starve. There's nothing much left down in Yale with the Chinese cleaning up the old bars for flour gold—they just make wages. Well," he shook his big head, "I know what you're thinking."

"What, Billy?"

"Same old story over again, eh? A few days, feet or dollars more—and we're millionaires."

"You're not so far out," smiled the Judge.

"I don't blame you, must hear a lot of this. I'm not complaining now, but right down in my soul I feel we're on the right track. Sounds crazy, eh?"

"What about your partners?"

"Just the same—we're all crazy, the seven of us."

"You're a miner, Billy. I'm not, and I can't spend Government money testing private property."

"That's all right; forget it."

He pinched a cow's tongue as though to squeeze the secret out of it, and for a space there was silence while Begbie ruminated. Cows' tongues—sulphides—black sand! Cows' tongues were small flat slabs worn smooth by their grinding passage, and tended to work down through the mass of gravel towards bedrock. Sulphides would be from the yet undiscovered motherlode dreamed of by every Argonaut. Black sand—one found gold without that, but seldom black sand without gold. So the thing hung together, and if all these did indicate nearness to the old channel—and why

not?—another treasure house might open in the Cariboo.

Something else about it too. Begbie—a man of reason, not impulse—of wisdom, not fancy—studied the strained, bearded face and haunted eyes while there seemed to assemble and present itself a ghostly company, thousands of others all bearded like Barker, eyes all warm with the same inward fire, all the children of adventure. It seemed, too, that these men amongst whom he moved, whom he judged and guided, were gathered here on Lower Williams to join with Barker, and they signalled that it wasn't the possession of gold they found their joy in, but the pursuit of it; that was their chosen lot in life. What they found they never kept long, others would profit more than they did, and all they asked was sweat and labour and hunger and toil and the bright promise at the end of the trail.

"How far do you estimate to bedrock?"

"Fifteen or twenty feet—not more."

"Much trouble with water?"

"Nothing we can't handle," he got up, stared about sombrely, "well, thanks, Judge, the boys are waiting for me."

"Look here, Billy, your gang is stranded, and I've authority to aid deserving prospectors when in need."

"Is that so!"

"Now if I find that seven hundred passage money, I relieve myself of the responsibility of getting you out of the Cariboo. While if you took the money and didn't go out—well—"

"My God! sir, do you mean that!"

"Come round to my office this afternoon and see. Good luck."

Turning upstream towards the Little Canyon, he saw approaching a tall, clean-shaven, thin-cheeked stranger whose appearance was arresting. This individual walked with an air of pleasurable interest in all around him. He wore snowy linen, a loose, black tie, a wide-brimmed black

hat of clerical suggestion whose glossy texture absorbed the beams of the morning sun. He had a waistline. From the breast pocket of his tightly buttoned frock coat projected the corner of a red silk kerchief, his light grey bell-shaped trousers displayed a faultless cut, the long, narrow boots had the sheen of a raven's wing. Age anywhere between thirty and forty.

Nearing the Judge, he lifted his hat in a wide sweep.

"Good morning, sir."

Begbie smiled, nodded. He knew the type. From the stranger's manner of assurance he might have owned the Cariboo, but the Judge was instantly aware that his main assets were probably a faro deck with some packs of cards on which the pinpricks were discoverable only by the long supersensitive fingertips that bore no signs of toil. In years past many a gambler had stood before him, but of them all none had presented the sartorial triumph of this courtly unknown.

"Good morning to you."

"Judge Begbie, I take it?"

"That's my name. And yours?"

"Flint, sir—Lemuel Flint of Frisco—and glad to know you. This weather is certainly salubrious."

"It is," smiled the Judge, reflecting that Mr. Flint might know him later, but not yet. "You have not been long in Richfield?"

"No, judge, arrived just a few days ago, and I like what I find here. Richfield appeals to me. In this town there's a respect for the law that's refreshing, nothing like Stanleytown—of which you may have heard."

"I have, and we don't propose that it shall be. A lot of your countrymen are here, and, so far, they have respected our laws better than their own across the border. You are—er—in the mining business, Mr. Flint?"

"No, Judge, not exactly in it, but kind of associated." Lemuel, relishing this meeting with the leading figure in The Cariboo, understood that the Judge understood: he

was not to be outdone in suavity, and it was a real pleasure to stand here talking like this with one with whom he was determined his future contacts would never be otherwise than social. "Yes, sir," he continued, "right here is where you find the true pioneers—that's what they are. Yesterday I was on the Cunningham, and it did me good to see those pilgrims picking gold out of the ground like it was radishes. That, Judge, is downright inspiring."

Begbie chuckled: he could visualise Mr. Flint's inspiration at work, could make a fair guess what this would cost the Cunningham owners and others before the snow flew and The Cariboo froze solid, but until a gambler overstepped the law his rights as an individual were considerable."

"Yes, and these diggings are likely to be still richer. You will be here for the—ah—season?"

"That's how it looks now. I reckon to go south this fall, till then I'm at the Hotel de France. Fond of poetry, Judge?"

Begbie's eyes rounded a little. "Why—yes—I am."

"Same here. When things kind of drag I take a little pasear with the poets. Right now this camp reminds me of something Mr. W. Browning wrote."

"Indeed! what did he write?"

"*Gold is the strength, the success of the world.*" Now that's a fact, you can see it from here, and them picks and shovels are making a sort of tune to go with it—the music of gold, Judge, that's what it is."

Begbie, finding no immediate reply, felt something like the fencer who discovers in his opponent an unexpected resource of thrust and parry. This man, though a gambler, was something more, and his future residence in Richfield likely to be a matter of general interest. For a moment he probed his own memory, then:—

"Very apt, Mr. Flint; I did not know that line. Well, I trust that your activities in The Cariboo will cause neither yourself nor others any regret."

Lemuel bowed: it was neatly put, perfectly understood, gracefully received, and his opinion of the Judge left nothing to be desired.

"And, by the way, do you happen to remember what Dean Swift wrote about cards?"

"Right now, sir, I don't believe I do."

"It was this:—

How shall the Muse her aid impart,
Unskilled in all the terms of art?
Or in harmonious numbers put
The deal, the shuffle and the cut."

In Mr. Flint's dark eyes a shade of embarrassment was visible.

"Dean Swift, you said—was he a clerical gent?"

"Very much so."

"Well, Judge, being in the clergy, how much do you reckon he knew about cards?"

"Ah, Mr. Flint, not nearly as much as yourself; that's what he deplored. Good day to you."

Begbie walked on, chuckling. Here was one of the light-fingered gentry for whom men like Barker were unconsciously slaving, and he wondered what would happen here when the last card had been dealt, the last sluiceway cleaned up, and the ravished creeks of the Cariboo reverted to solitude. He was thinking about this when he met Ma Bowers walking past, a basket on her arm.

"Good morning," he saluted her. "we are well met; how's the family?"

"Family's first-rate, Judge; Dan's working the Red Jacket, and hired Mr. Harper; you heard about that?"

"I did."

"Johnny wasn't for it, and Mr. Sing didn't care either way, but Dan had to get down to something. Think there's anything there?"

"I hope so—but who can tell?"

"Johnny swears there ain't."

"My opinion on that subject isn't worth having, Mrs. Bowers."

"In your position I guess you have to be careful, eh? Like to sit a minute?"

He could see she was much occupied with something, so they sat; she mopped her face, and he waited while again the channel of thought changed, and it struck him that compared to the child of fortune and the gambler here was someone who would make an imprint on the country that would endure. He could see the new cabin with sagging clotheslines strung between the pines, and steaming tubs, and Mary with her sleeves rolled up; 'twas all more like a home than anything else on Williams, and the sight did him good.

"Judge, just between you an' me I'm wondering if we did right about the Red Jacket. I feel sort of guilty. Remember what you said that night on the trail?"

"I hope I didn't say too much."

"You were talking about gold often being where you didn't expect, an' not being where you did. I told Johnny about that, an' he said the man that didn't expect anything never got fooled."

"Johnny was not far out."

"I guess not. Now my Dan he's growed up in one sense but not another, so pretty often I have to take a hand in. But I'm only a woman. There's nights when I lie awake wishing I could see a little further ahead—and of course there's Mary."

"I think I understand," he said gently.

Finding encouragement in his eyes, she gave way to impulse, and told him about Mary not being their child because it seemed right he should know in case anything happened to her and Dan.

"I never had a child—that's pretty hard on Dan, and I'll never get over it. Steve—that's Dan's cousin—is her

father. Nobody's heard of him since he lit out just ahead of the sheriff eighteen years ago. She was a couple of months old. Then her Ma died, and that's where we came in. She don't know a thing about it, and never will so far as we're concerned, but now she's taken up with that young Harper we fished out of the Fraser, an' he's getting soft on her. It's difficult. I guess there's nothing wrong with him, but he hasn't a cent, and a heap to learn, and—well—"

"Why worry about it, Mrs. Bowers. Harper is just one of those wandering Britishers you find everywhere. He may make good, he may not; there's a lot he'll have to unlearn first, and nothing you can settle now."

"Not a thing," she admitted. "Then there's a Mr. Flint—he's on my mind too. I can't see him quite straight, and—"

"Go on."

Something in his manner and speech and wise, kind eyes made Ma feel more than ever like loosening up, so she loosened, emptying her soul of all it held concerning Lemuel, realising her obligation, confessing her suspicion, and concluding that in spite of everything she had a sneaking liking for the man, and the way he acted made her sort of glad she was a woman.

When she had finished, the Judge gave a great laugh.

"Mrs. Bowers, you're trying to handle too much all at once. It can't be done. In a place like this you deal with people as you find them, you can't take 'em to bits and fit 'em together again. I have just met Flint; he is unusual in more ways than one, and I found myself wishing that he had chosen some other pursuit. That may happen yet, and if he does, it will be a success. His instincts are much more desirable than his present occupation. I can quite understand what you feel, and I'll keep an eye on him. As to Mary, you were right to tell me. I'll not forget."

"I'm certainly glad you dropped in here to-day," said Ma fervently.

"So am I. Now I suggest that you think of life in the Cariboo from another angle. The coming of you and your family to these diggings has given pleasure to many you don't know and never will. No doubt of that."

"What on earth——"

"It's quite true. It makes these men, all of 'em, happier to see a woman like you and a girl like Mary. The mere sight of the washing on your line means a good deal: it reminds them of something they don't want to forget, and wonder when they'll see again. You're quite a blessing in Richfield, Mrs. Bowers, and not in disguise either."

Ma glowed with pure pleasure. "Why, Judge, if it comes to that—but I never——"

"No, you wouldn't, but the fact remains, and let me know when I can be of use." He heaved up, large, smiling, strong, confident. "Now I'm going to see Mrs. Cameron—not many more visits there, I fear."

"Would this afternoon do? it'd suit her a lot better."

"Would it?"

"I was just going up there myself with a couple of clean sheets and a pillowcase and suchlike. Any woman would sooner be fixed up before she has a real visitor."

"Aren't you one?"

"No, sir, I just go so often as I can—most every day. Jack's certainly good to her, and does all he knows how, but there's a heap of things no man alive would ever notice that make a pile of difference to a woman. Say, I guess I've talked too much."

"Mrs. Bowers, when next you feel like talking, let me know. I want to be here."

High noon in Richfield. On a balcony overhanging the high, straggling sidewalk stood Scotch Jenny, proprietor of the Hotel de France whose flimsy structure bulked over the lesser buildings on either side. Jenny, of unknown but often guessed at age, and long conversant with vagaries of the Argonauts, had struck the Cariboo when its golden

tide was rising fast, and straightway went into business, fortified by previous experience in more southerly diggings. She had a kindly granitic, sunburned face, reddish hair now streaked with grey, and a wide knowledge of sin in all its primitive forms. Broadbuilt like a man, she enjoyed immunity from all feminine foibles, wore a dress of bright tartan and a heavy necklace of nuggets.

Thus poised above the surging stream of Richfield humanity, she surveyed the jostling street with shrewd grey eyes that missed nothing of note. When she saw the Judge, she waved a hand, and, leaning over, displayed a surprisingly good pair of legs.

"Howdy, Judge—how's things?"

The Judge assured her that all went well.

"Quite a raft of the boys coming in, eh?"

"There are, Jenny. Nice place you've got here now."

"'Tain't so bad. Take care of yourself."

He nodded, while the 'Duke of York' sent a military salute from the front door. The Duke, who presided at the hotel bar, stood six feet and a half in his socks, and looked more. He had bulging, glassy eyes, dark brown sidewhiskers, well oiled and brushed, ruddy cheeks with a sort of glaze on them. He could slide a brimming tumbler over twenty feet of polished counter without spilling a drop.

"Good day, sir—good day, Judge."

"Well Duke, I hear business is good."

"Yes sir, all we can handle, and more. Hear anything of Michael Trupp these days?"

"Nothing very new, but the odds are that you've served him in there this last week or so."

The Duke allowed that this was so, and Begbie passed on smiling.

Instinct told him that news of Trupp might be expected any day.

"Morning, doctor."

Doc Flattery—whose methods belied his own name—

was sunning himself, tilted back in a chair in front of a small office. The sign read, 'P. Flattery, M.D. Horse and man.' When Begbie asked if he'd seen Mrs. Cameron lately, he said:—

"I did, Judge, two days ago, and don't know what's keeping her alive, unless it's Mrs. Bowers."

"As bad as that?"

"'Fraid so—the flame's just burning out. But she seems more contented. What about Jack?"

"Still working his heart out on barren gravel—I don't like it, Flattery, but—well—it's his own affair."

"That's it. Is the Government going to give me a hospital this summer? I need it."

"I'll do what I can. Much sickness?"

"No, but later on—you know how it is."

Begbie did know—men slaving in the early rains; sleeping dog-tired in wet underclothes—pneumonia. It took them fast.

"You're doing all you can anyway."

Now he walked out on Upper Williams where, with only four months of working time—perhaps less—no moment of daylight was wasted.

There were long flumes that caught water higher up and fed it through smaller branches to the sluiceboxes. Some of the claims straddled the old creek bed and carried rich pay dirt, while those next door straddled only disillusion. Buckets came up loaded, were dumped, shovelled into the sloping boxes making a swirl of muddiness. When this cleared one saw the yellow stuff thickened behind the shallow riffles. Bigger nuggets, up to the size of walnuts, were picked out of the dumps like plums from a pudding; a man would wash one in the sluicebox, heft it, guess at its weight, drop it into a canvas sack. On other claims men with pans were testing each bucket; they would wash away all but the finest stuff, give the remainder a tilt, hold it so the sun struck it, and find only a taint of black sand.

Dan, with young Harper and two helpers, was sinking a new shaft on the Red Jacket. They were down a few feet. Harper had stripped to the waist; his skin, now tanned pink, was mottled with sun blisters. Dan paid him ten dollars a day, of which he saved seven. When they saw the Judge, Dan straightened up, but Harper worked on.

"Well, Mr. Bowers, so you've taken the plunge—how far do you reckon to bedrock?"

"Not more'n twenty feet, sir, we'll soon make it. Harry, don't kill yourself."

Harper laughed, he looked happy; the Judge noted how fine and slim his body was, how ill suited to the work.

"Good day, sir," he gave a sort of sailor salute, "I'm beginning to feel like an old timer. Heard any more of Michael Trupp?"

"No, but I expect to. Still interested?"

"I could use that two thousand."

"So could a good many others, I'll let you know."

"Good day, Judge," said Mary behind him.

She had arrived with Dan's dinner pail, an excursion that she made every day, and never told Ma how much she enjoyed it. She always looked very demure, feeling pleasantly feminine and just the right age, and walked with her eyes down but not enough to miss salutes and smiles from hundreds of men she passed on the way. None of them ever spoke to her—It was a quarter mile of frank admiration—and she kept thinking of Harper who with no effort on his part was beginning to mean more than all the rest put together.

Harper brought his own pail. Now that he was working for Dan he paid even less attention to her than before, and had hardly anything to say when she got there. Couldn't he see that she cared? He was just very polite and strictly impersonal, and Dan would be too busy with his dinner to talk at all, so she'd often go over to the Cunningham or

Dutch Bill or the Phoenix and stare at the sluiceboxes. The Red Jacket had no sluicebox.

Today she had met Marta wearing a blue silk blouse, green skirt, yellow scarf over her hair. The effect was tropical. Right away Marta took her hands, scarlet from the washtubs, and shook her head.

"Honey, I'd quit that—there's more Chinks coming in every day. No white woman can stand up to 'em when it's a case of soapsuds."

"It's good money, Marta, and we need it."

"What are you making a week?"

"Fifty dollars between us, with no starching. There's none in the store."

"Chicken feed! I'm cleaning up a hundred not counting the nuggets the boys give me. Why not drop in and talk to Jenny?"

"I don't want anything to do with her, and Ma wouldn't stand for it."

"Seems like plain foolishness to me with Jenny looking for more Hurdies right now. What are you scared of anyway?"

"I'm not going to be hugged at fifty cents for three minutes."

"There's no hugging at all—it's all arm's length except once in a while—then you tell the Duke and he throws the man out."

"Well—perhaps—but anyway I can't do it."

"They're just big kids, honey, that's all—lonely for their own womenfolk and wondering when they'll see 'em again. If anyone gets fresh, it's only once—he don't try it again."

"Marta, please, I'd sooner do laundry. You don't understand."

Something in this went home. Marta met the girl's eyes and a sort of tenderness came into her face.

"Maybe I do, honey. Sorry I pushed you."

"That's all right."

"Y'see there was a time when—Oh hell!—What's the use? So long."

Mary was smiling over this when she met the Judge.

"Well, Miss Mary, the Cariboo seems to agree with you."

"It's just fine. I'm busy from morning till night."

"Over the new laundry?"

"We're turning business away."

"I've noticed the camp looks considerably cleaner since you started—Mr. Bowers, I've just met your wife on an errand of mercy."

"That'll be to Mrs. Cameron."

"Yes, and I fear she hasn't far to go. How are things on the Jacket?"

"Dunno yet, but we're figuring that big nugget of Johnny's didn't get here alone."

"Well, in case it did, I'd keep something up your sleeve. Good luck."

The Judge went on to his house, a small square building one half of which served as office, to find Sergeant Lindsay, the only policeman in Richfield, waiting for him; Lindsay looked excited; another man, Simmons, constable from Quesnel Forks, was with him.

"What's the trouble now, Simmons?"

"Murder! sir, murder and attempted robbery."

"Michael Trupp again?"

"Yes sir, three Jews on their way in to buy gold. They had a bankroll that would choke a horse, and camped this side of the Forks in a two-man tent."

"Just where, Simmons?"

"A bit back off the Bald Mountain trail. Mike and a pal came along after midnight, cut the ropes, and—"

"On what date, man, what date?" Begbie's voice was harsh.

"Very early on the twelfth, sir."

"Four days ago—you did well to get here. Go on."

"They cut the guyropes, sir, the tent scuttled: shooting

started when the three crawled out—two killed outright.”

“How do you know that?”

“The third passed out before dawn, but he got Mike’s pal through the heart. I reached there before he died. Last thing he said was something about a black mask.”

“How could he see a black mask at night?”

“Moon was clear, sir.”

“The dead bandit not masked?”

“No sir.”

“Identified?”

“No sir, nothing on him to tell us a thing.”

“Did Trupp—if it was Trupp—get away with the money?”

“No, sir,” Simmons took a roll from his pocket, “it’s here—it was hidden under the brush they made their beds with. I’ve written a statement giving names of the three.”

“How much money?”

“Seven thousand dollars, sir.”

“Anything else?”

“I emptied all pockets—kept them separate—and swore in two deputies. They’re on guard now at the scene of the crime. Then I got here as quick as I could.”

Begbie’s eyes were stern. Kill, rob and run! That was Trupp’s method. Four hundred miles of crooked trail through an unpeopled wilderness—at any mile of which he could step aside a hundred feet and be safe beyond all finding. There was the problem.

“Well, Sergeant, what do you make of it?”

Lindsay looked baffled. He’d give ten years’ pay to lay hands on Trupp—but he might have seen the man a dozen times without knowing it. Nothing to prevent Trupp from being in Richfield now—to-day—eating, sleeping, talking, plotting more crimes. One couldn’t apprehend an invisible man. And well Trupp knew it.

“He’ll be making a mistake before long, sir. There’s our best chance.”

"I hope so. Meantime there'll have to be an inquest. I'll go back now with you, Simmons, and look into this thing myself."

"Any orders for me, sir?" asked Lindsay.

"Put this money in the safe. Post up a notice increasing that reward to three thousand dollars. Keep your eyes and ears open. I'll be back inside the week."

* * *

The Cameron cabin on Lower Williams, twelve feet square, mud plastered with a mud floor, was on the bank opposite the claim and some twenty feet above the stream. Sophy's bed of canvas stretched over a pole frame, it had a straw stuffed mattress, head next the fireplace so when the door was open she could raise herself on her elbows and see the shafthouse, hear the whine of the windlass and rattle of a dumped bucket. She was a little semi-transparent wisp of a woman, her brown hair streaked with premature white. She had a small, delicately moulded face cut like a cameo, and large brown eyes like a deer's; her fingers were narrow and pointed; as she lay there the heavy grey blanket seemed to flatten her wasted body and leave only the outline of a skeleton.

For weeks past her world had been framed in that doorway. She hadn't any complaints, and would persist that she wasn't really ill, only overtired, and she'd soon be about again. Cameron would tell her how the shaft was looking better and better every foot down, with fewer boulders which had made the first half so difficult, now and then a cow's tongue, and lately, a showing of black sand, so they couldn't be so far from the paystreak on bed-rock. She always agreed with him.

He would fry bacon and boil the tea hard because there was no bite in it if you didn't, and chop off a slice of bannock. She'd pretend to eat though it nearly choked her, while the smell of hot fat made her sick.

Then he'd stand in the doorway and stare down at Lower Williams cursing two things under his breath—one the punishment she was suffering, the other the chain that bound him to that tortured river bed. He was helpless against both. Always she'd tell him that really she did feel better, and he mustn't wait because Mrs. Bowers would be there any time. At this he'd go back and put his calloused hand on her forehead and take a blind look round the cabin and make for Lower Williams.

"How is she, Mr. Cameron?" Ma Bowers was a little short of breath.

"Just the same, ma'am, I don't see any difference: she'll be glad you're here."

Ma went in. "Well, Mrs. Cameron my dear, this is certainly one fine day: I just met the Judge and had a talk; he'll be round later on. How do you find yourself?"

When she got this far Ma didn't wait for an answer but picked up the sick woman and laid her on Cameron's bed; "not more'n eighty pounds," she thought, "petering out right under my eyes;" and took the straw mattress out in the sun to shake the lumps out of it. She put it back under a single blanket, then the clean sheets and the pillow-slip she'd brought, while Mrs. Cameron watched without a word, and smiled when Ma said, "It's nice to be fixing up a woman after twenty years fussing over a man." When the bed was clean and fresh she'd lift her patient back to it, and just for a moment the small head would rest on the warm hollow of her shoulder; then she'd comb out the fine, silky hair and bathe the white face and neck and breast. It was strange to see that breast so round and firm as though all the vitality of the dwindling frame were still gathered there waiting for some phantom child that never came. "She'd have made a good mother," thought Ma, "and, oh God! perhaps I would too." The feeling of clean linen, which Sophy always loved, brought tears into the brown eyes, and while she was being bathed she looked up and

said, "I like your touch," then lay silent till Ma had swept up the hearth with a broom made of black alder twigs, and done a lot of other small things that no man would ever think of but made all the difference.

"I'll never thank you enough," said the small voice, "and you with all the work you've got."

"You just forget it, Mrs. Cameron, my dear. More comfortable now?"

"Much more."

"Look just a mite better too."

"Think so? How are things on the Red Jacket?"

"Nothing yet; I guess it's too soon."

"Your husband's in first-rate company, Jack says."

"Sure he is; we're not worrying—no use worrying."

"How's your daughter?"

"Just fine, my dear."

"I guess your husband's something like mine."

"That's so, or we wouldn't be here."

"About the most you can do for a man is find out what he wants, then help him all you can."

"That's my experience, Mrs. Cameron."

"You wouldn't want them any other way, would you?"

"I can't imagine 'em any other way."

"Come here, my dear, sit close a minute."

Ma did this, and sat on a stool. She took the wasted hand in hers, and told her to talk right out if she'd a mind to, so she went on:—

"Later, pretty soon I guess, Jack'll be downhearted because I'll be gone: I got that straight from Doc Flattery, but I knew it anyway. When that happens don't you let him worry more'n you can help, because Mr. Barker's going to strike it higher up on the creek."

"Sure, he will," said Ma stoutly, "he's bound to."

"I just saw it—I didn't exactly dream it. Jack will strike it too, but not yet a while. I told him that this

morning, so he mustn't sell out, and not let my going make any difference."

"I guess he'll do whatever you say, Mrs. Cameron, my dear." Then Ma went on to give what general news she could, but nothing about Michael Trupp and the murders at Quesnel Forks with which all Richfield was buzzing. She was in the middle of this and hard put to keep it going when the little woman said:—

"Can you folks go back where you came from?"

"Not right now with Dan just started in."

"Don't leave it so long that you can't ever get back; it's bad when you've got no place to go to."

"That's right too. Now what about a nice cup of tea not too strong."

"I guess I'll wait till Jack gets home."

"Then there's some doughnuts an' fresh cookies, they ain't hard to eat if I do say so. Mrs. Cameron, my dear, I'll be round tomorrow, but if you feel stuck for anything send Jack over; I'll come right up."

Sophy nodded—she had a strange expression, her eyes looked haunted like those of the Southerner at the front end of the two-man barrow—suddenly she reached out and drew Ma to her with convulsive strength.

"Don't let anyone else touch me," she whispered, "just you."

Ma choked a little at that, bent down to kiss her, and gave her promise, then went out and struck along the Richfield road for home, her eyes misty. Being with a person half in this world, a half in the next, was something like being in church, though she hadn't been inside a real church for years; it had the same effect of flattening out the things that worried you so you felt ashamed of being worried at all, while you became aware of a lot of others that weren't exactly things but more like large truths floating all round you, to which you never paid any attention except in moments like these. The result was to make one

kind of sanctified and thankful and humble and determined not to miss the chance of giving others a helping hand. Sophy wouldn't be there many days longer, that was certain: equally certain she had nothing to gain by hanging on; so it was a case for understanding rather than sorrow, and keeping an eye on Jack when it happened.

Turning her thoughts to Mary, she wished there were some young people for the girl, that young Harper would come round of an evening. She'd always had the idea that English gents—and he was a gent—were too dandified to get their feet in the sand, but she'd changed her opinion about him: he'd repaid the other sixty dollars since Dan hired him. As yet he was no sort of a husband for any girl, but was nice, real nice, and his politeness, even the way he'd look at her when she spoke, was something she'd never experienced before.

Marta? She'd tried hard there, but stuck halfway: maybe Marta was as she claimed, but it was hard to see how this could be true. She acknowledged Marta's good heart, but objected to the garb that covered it. Too peacocky! Marta was welcome in the Bowers' cabin, but not too welcome; perhaps she felt that since she very seldom dropped in. Ma blamed herself for being narrow in this way, but deep in her was a sort of virginal primness making her more critical of her own sex than of men. A man, she thought, could be downright stupid yet somehow remain a superior creature, though a woman would be plum crazy to tell him so. Maybe he didn't need telling.

She was nearing home when down the road came a figure to which at first she paid no attention; at second glance it seemed faintly familiar. The man was about middle height with sloping shoulders and a light, quick step—a clean-shaven man who'd be about forty-five though he had the build and carriage of a boy. It was this lightness of movement, catlike in its ease, that gave her a sensation of cold water suddenly thrown in her face; it stopped her and

opened her mouth while she stood staring, staring, whispering, "not him, God, oh don't let it be him!"

The man had stopped too, was gazing at her; he took off his hat, not in salute but to run his fingers through his hair, and in that instant and action her bleared memory came clean, and nothing more was needed when he stepped up and looked at her with the cold, grey eyes of Mary's father.

"You haven't changed much, Bessie; eighteen years now, isn't it?"

Her lips froze; with nothing to say she blinked at him like an owl in sunlight, murmuring "it's not him—it can't be him," though she knew it was him, and life had been turned upside down all in a moment. Her brain was working so fast it made her dizzy, but she must have a plan—a scheme—a something quickly. The whole future hung on that.

"No," she said coolly, "I haven't changed much; neither have you."

"You folks all here, the three of you?"

"Been here five weeks—and you?"

He looked at her with a faint curiosity while she tried to deduce from his manner and appearance what deviltry he was up to now. Here was the same Stephen with the same sidelong glance one caught but could not hold: he didn't appear truculent or threatening, just shy and slippery with a sort of 'catch me if you can' about him.

"Mary'll be nineteen now? You called her Mary, didn't you?"

"Yes, Steve, nineteen. What's that to you?"

"Natural interest in one's own child."

"The first you ever took," said Ma bluntly. She had herself in hand now, was less afraid of fear, though the fear was still there.

"Never too late to mend."

"Steve, listen to me! Mary don't know she's your child,

no reason she should: she thinks she's ours—that's the way it's got to stand."

"Lied to my girl about her own father, did you?"

"We didn't tell any lies; we left you right out, we didn't say one word to her about you—ever. She don't know anything about that warrant. If you'd sooner she did—well—that's easy."

Ma's nerves were bristling like a startled hedgehog; she felt a different person, but his easy assurance disturbed her more than could any threat.

"Steve," she went on, "Mary don't owe you anything for deserting her except what it's pretty hard for a girl to repay, but I guess you'll be paid somehow. If you aim to break her heart, are you any better off for it? While Dan's likely to break your neck. He's slow to start but he don't quit, and we've got friends here, plenty of 'em."

Bowers laughed in her face, "You can leave Dan out. Was that her at a washtub a piece back?"

"You—you saw her!"

"I did, I saw my own daughter. We passed the time of day, she gave me a drink. She's pretty, prettier than she promised. Something like her mother. I'd like to meet her," he added reflectively, "let's go."

Ma was aghast, confused; she had a sensation of something like jealousy, not for fear of being supplanted but of this man's license. He was footloose, tied to nothing and nobody, nothing to consider but the promptings of his own tricky soul, free to make trouble where before no trouble was.

"Steve," she said, studying the crafty face, thinking how always after this it would swim between her and Mary every time she looked at the girl, "there's two ways open to you; you can go right to the cabin now and tell her who you are. I won't deny it."

"Coming to your senses, eh?"

"Wait and find out. You can do that while I go to

Judge Begbie and say, 'Here's the girl's real father, but there's some other details.' "

"Like that?" Bowers' eyes hardened.

"You're getting it straight. Just in case anything happened to me or Dan, or Mary got married, I wanted the Judge to know, and he does know—part of it—and what he'll say to you I kind of guess."

"You told him about that warrant?"

"I'm keeping that for next time. There's another thing! Mary's of age now, an' her own master, an' I've an idea how she'd take it, so what with one thing and another, not forgetting some friends we've made here, I suspicion you'd find Richfield pretty unhealthy. There's one side of it. The other is I don't know what you've been up to all this time, but can come pretty near it, or how you're fixed, but eighteen years ago you were pretty light-fingered. You'd do most anything for money, so if you'll take a hundred dollars and clear out and keep your trap shut, I'm ready to talk business."

Ma's breast was in tumult, but her voice steady; now she had conquered fear, was encased in a sort of invisible armour that made her formidable; no longer did she feel sanctified and exalted like a short half-hour ago. She was fighting mad and clenched her teeth and battled for the happiness of one for whom she had died if need be.

Bowers laughed in her face. "That's you, all right. How's Dan?"

She was trying to read the thoughts behind those shifty eyes; his features looked lined, his expression hard to decipher. He was a quicker thinker than herself, she knew that, but it wasn't in him to think straight, and she knew that too.

"Well, Steve?"

"Not making much allowance for a man's natural feelings, are you?"

"That's where the hundred comes in."

When she flung this at him he gave a smirk telling her it hadn't missed. "Steve, I'm gambling to keep it from Mary that her father is a skunk—and worse. Right now you're thinking you can pocket the cash—it's every cent I can spare, we made it by laundry work—then turn up an' introduce yourself, but if you try that things'll break so loose you won't know which way to look. I guess that Ohio warrant would interest the Judge quite a lot."

Bowers stroked his chin, a wrinkle deepened between his brows; he seemed not angered but rather admitting she had scored a point in a game she could not afford to lose. Had she known then, as she did later, more of the man she faced, the game for her was won and over, but there was nothing to go on except what happened nineteen years ago: she was desperate; she ought to be at home, and if she didn't get there soon Mary would come in search of her.

"A hundred, you said?"

"That's what I said."

"Make it two, and it's a go."

This shook her; behind the laundry money was another three hundred she had saved to see them through the winter should they stay, or take them out if they didn't. It was sacred; the biggest three hundred in the world, the wall between them and disaster; they often spoke of it; Dan would laugh, pretending he wanted to put it into the Red Jacket, but it warmed him to think of it in moments when faith faltered and he sweated over tons of barren gravel.

"Take it or leave it. I've a fancy after all these years to meet my own girl for a minute. It's worth two hundred."

The real man spoke that time. Ma capitulated: this would leave her in bad shape; she would have to lie and play-act, which was harder than any work, but she couldn't help that, so she gave him a jerky nod and tried not to look relieved.

Cariboo Road

"You're making it tough for all of us, but you don't care, so what's the use of talking?"

"None at all. When do I get it, and where? Come up with you now?"

"No," she snapped. "I'll meet you here to-morrow, same place and time. I suppose the Lord made you, Steve, like the rest of us, but maybe His foot slipped when you were born."



5

A Partnership Offer

WHEN Sunday came round to Richfield the population divided itself into three groups: those who had hit the paystreak stuck to it, they didn't keep Sabbath; others who still hoped to hit it might put in half a day; while to those who had given up hope of hitting anything the Sabbath made no difference at all, they just hung round talking or circulating to watch the stuff come up on the rich men's claims. Often there'd be whispered rumours of a new strike beyond Antler or Canadian, at which they'd hurry off, hope reviving, only to run into other Argonauts on their way back from the new Eldorado a little poorer even than when they started. So day by day the few rich grew richer and the many broken ones even more broke.

On a Sunday, however, the smoke from hundreds of cabins seemed to rise more lazily, open doors spread a smell of coffee and fried bacon. You'd see men stretched out flat in the sun, hands locked behind their necks, a sure sign of fatigue, or trimming their beards, or shaving at a piece of looking-glass against a log wall, washing shirts, chopping firewood. Those who had any money would do their buying that morning, and gather in knots on the crazy, propped-up sidewalk—the saloons not being open before noon.

The Rev. Sheepshanks had a service in some dance hall, surprisingly well attended. The Judge always went when in Richfield; often he'd sit beside Scotch Jenny who wore her brightest plaids and a green felt hat with a stuffed purple pigeon on top. Likely as not Julie Picot would be

Cariboo Road

there with Annie Muller, both dressed so quietly you'd never guess what went on through the week. Annie had a German prayerbook with gold-edged leaves and a gold cross on the cover; she'd share this with Julie. They hated each other, but on these occasions seemed to feel the need of mutual support, and made a sort of truce. The boys would hang round till they came out, touch their hats, say not a word but exchange whimsical glances while the two girls walked off and started hating each other again.

The Rev. Sheepshanks was tall, bony; in the Wake-up-Jake restaurant, run by Andrew Kelly, he'd once eaten a whole leg of mutton followed by two raisin pies. His sermons were always mournful with a lot of suffering; he'd preach on the Prodigal Son, picking out a few in the congregation, looking straight at them as he did so; or the Good Samaritan, or lepers, so before he got through most of his hearers had concluded there were worse things than being out of luck in the Cariboo, which perhaps was what he aimed at. And he never once brought in Mary Magdalen.

Richfield had its dinner later on Sunday. Afterwards those who were operating poor claims were apt to return to them for an hour or so as though magnetized. The creek bed had a sort of fascination; when one wasn't so tired it somehow looked more promising, and they'd pick up a shovel, turn over a little gravel, or even hoist a bucket load just on the chance. Quite a few would go visiting. They'd walk all over Lower Williams with its abandoned pits and dumps where Billy Barker and his partners never lost an hour of daylight. Everyone knew about the Judge finding the seven hundred dollars, and there was heavy betting for and against Billy hitting the old creek bottom before the lay-over. The present creek bed was three hundred feet wide here, and somewhere in that width must lie the old one, much narrower, maybe thirty feet. But where? Jack Cameron was after the same thing still lower down.

You couldn't see any difference between the gravel those two were hoisting and the stuff on Upper Williams, but one carried good pay, the other didn't, so certainly Billy and Jack had the Cariboo fever.

Ma, feeling it wouldn't be quite fair to God, didn't go to church the Sunday after she met Steve Bowers. She wanted to be alone for a while. Pretending, acting a lie, hurt her grievously; she was asking herself if it wouldn't have been wiser and braver to let the truth come out, trusting to Mary's love to soften the blow. When Sabbath came round she said that some of the boys were sure to be up with their laundry so she'd better stay at home. Mary and Harper went to hear the Rev. Sheepshanks, while Johnny and Dan took their rifles and set off towards Jack of Clubs Lake in hopes of getting a mule-deer. There was beef enough in camp, but the Oregon herds were stringy by the time they hit Williams Creek.

Ma was busy at the odds and ends of things a woman does if she gets the chance, when her first client arrived. Mr. Flint had a bundle under his arm.

"Well, ma'am," he took off his hat, "how do we find ourselves this fine day?"

"Pretty spry, Mr. Flint, how's yourself?"

"No complaints except we've become kind of strangers—which I certainly deplore.

'Oh, women, in our hours of ease
Uncertain, coy and hard to please;
When pain and anguish fret the brow
A ministering angel thou!'

That's what the poet, Mr. W. Scott, wrote about women."

"Never heard of him. Got some more shirts?"

"Three, ma'am, this time. I appreciate your trouble in the matter of buttons; I fix them on with wire myself, but that ain't too good."

Ma nodded: try as she might, she couldn't quite accept

Cariboo Road

Lemuel, but did welcome his shirts; they were of fine linen unlike any others that came her way, so it was up to her to be affable.

"How's things with you?"

"I'm doing well, ma'am; this is a sporting community, and as I said to the Judge when we were talking the other day there's a respect for the law I admire. My trade is good. I hope you hold yours."

"Why shouldn't I?"

"Competition—there's four Chinamen arrived this week; they're setting up near the blacksmith shop, and prices are down. But I reckon to come here right along."

Ma looked grave. Marta had hinted at the same thing, so she and Mary both worked harder than ever.

"That's bad," she said, looking wistfully at the washtubs, "that's bad." Then when Lemuel asked her about the Red Jacket a wave came over her unlike anything she'd known before; in spite of all she could do things were working against her; she had tackled too much and was dreadfully tired for no reason at all.

"The Red Jacket—I don't know; none of us do, it's too early yet."

"I guess that's so. About five weeks more open season, eh?"

She nodded.

"Seems a long way from Frisco Bay, Mrs. Bowers, don't it?"

"That's right too," she said dully.

"Yes, ma'am, from here it's like a dream, but if business holds good I reckon to go back there for the winter; this climate is kind of rugged round January. If there's letters to any of your friends I'll be glad to take them."

Ma gave a gulp. No letter yet from Molly Clancy, of which she was somehow glad, nor had she written, and wouldn't till there was something worth telling. She pictured Molly in the garden in a riot of flowers and market

truck, while here were a few sickly nasturtiums in tomato cans.

"That's kind of you, Mr. Flint, I'll let you know," then she made herself add, "and I don't forget what you did on the *Brother Jonathan*. Just these three shirts?"

"And this smaller stuff—there's some holes in the socks."

"I'll fix that. No nightshirt?"

"No, ma'am, not this week."

Ma, wondering why, tossed the bundle into a bucket to soak, while something about the feel of this fine linen got under her skin. In comparison with others, what right had this gaily attired adventurer to be alive at all. He did no work, basked like a lizard when not gambling, was slick, sleek and prosperous. It beat creation to fathom why God stood for it. And yet she sort of liked him.

Lemuel sat twirling his wide-brimmed clerical hat: he looked thoughtful; his large eyes, moving slowly, caught hers for a moment and held them.

"Mrs. Bowers, could we have a little private talk right now?"

"Why, I—I guess so."

"It's on a matter of business."

"With me, Mr. Flint?"

"Yes, ma'am, with you—first; I don't aim to go any further unless you say so."

Ma plumped on the bench, folded her red hands, gave a nod.

"Go right along, Mr. Flint."

"Then it's this way. First, I value my association with you folks—that means a lot to a man who ain't got any of his own, specially when he's in my profession. Maybe you didn't know that?"

"It's your profession, Mr. Flint, and I ain't one word to say about it—not a word."

"Obliged, I'm sure. I kind of steered myself into it without exactly knowing why, and the rest came natural."

It sort of lodged in my fingertips. Just the same it meant that I didn't cohort with the kind of female that attracted me most, so that right now you remind me of what the poet, Mr. Jack Milton—he passed in his checks quite a while ago—was thinking about when he wrote—

‘This, this is she alone
Sitting like a Goddess bright
In the centre of her light’

‘You follow me?’

Ma, regarding her vacant washtubs, felt a little dazed.

‘Is that so!’

‘Yes, ma’am, it is. What’s more its hitched up with the business I spoke of. I haven’t any stake in this country, but I reckon I ought to,’ he waved a hand towards Upper Williams, ‘while those pilgrims are part of it—they’re opening her up right under our eyes. Mr. Bowers and Mr. Knott, they’re doing the same thing, and now I hanker to take a hand in. You get me?’

Ma sent him a quick, friendly smile. ‘Mr. Flint, I’m certainly glad to hear you talk like this, but why come to me with it?’

‘Reason is I aim to buy in somewhere, and sort of favour the Red Jacket.’

This struck her silent. The Red Jacket! that so far profitless jumble of sand and boulders! Four partners instead of three to face what she felt would be defeat—Dan—an undertaker—a Chinaman—now this gambler. That sounded just crazy, but was it any more crazy than much else in this Land of Eldorado? Searching Mr. Flint’s lean features, she could find nothing more than what he had told her, but—here her restless brain began to ferret about—had this proposal not something to do with—? Was Mr. Flint undergoing a change of heart? If so, why? And what was it the Judge said a while ago about this man making a success if he chose another pursuit?

"Well, ma'am?"

"Well, Mr. Flint, you've certainly made me sit up, but this is a free country, and it's your own money. Why you ask me instead of Dan I don't just know."

"Reason is I'm starting in at head office. Fifteen hundred is my limit, and I'd certainly appreciate the privilege. I'll be round in a couple of days for the laundry. So long, ma'am."

With this he strolled off in the direction of Upper Williams, leaving her in a maze of thought. Fifteen hundred! Absently she fingered a large silk kerchief, smooth as water—ten dollars each in Stanleytown. Dan never owned one, but they suited Lemuel, and she could not imagine him otherwise than adorned as was his custom. For some reason she could not grudge him this, and now it began to seem as though perhaps behind his variegated exterior moved another Lemuel, a lonely one, who spent empty hours known only to himself.



6

Bill Barker Strikes It

PRESENTLY Mary came back from church with Harper, talking fast, laughing, and the sight did her good. It was nice to see these young people so unafraid; perhaps the world wasn't as lopsided as one imagined.

After they had eaten, and when Mary was washing up, Harper gave Ma a look; they went off and sat under a jack pine; he was awkward, red in the face.

"Mrs. Bowers," he began, "it's rather difficult, so do you mind if I speak quite candidly?"

"I'd mind if you didn't, Harry. What's up?"

"It's about Mary."

"Now look here, young man, you aren't in any—"

"I thought so," he laughed, "but you're wrong this time."

"I'm certainly glad to hear it. What about Mary?"

"You know what I feel for you all, don't you?"

"Sure I do—forget it; we'd do it again any time."

"I believe you would. Mary's a great friend of Marta's, isn't she?"

"They're pretty friendly," admitted Ma with vague discomfort, "she's the only other girl Mary really knows in here."

"Then forgive me if I say Marta ought to be dropped."

Ma gave him a sharp look. "That's it, is it?"

"I haven't spoken before I was sure, but they oughtn't to be seen together. I owe you this much."

"Go on, Harry." Ma was clucking like a hen.

"The fact is there's a man living with her. I don't

know how long he's been there. It isn't fair that you shouldn't know."

"Did you tell Mary?"

"I thought I'd leave that to you."

Ma nodded, slowly, slowly; she was sad but not surprised; her instincts had been right.

"I'm glad you did," she sighed, "I'll fix it with daughter. I'm sorry about Marta; it'll be awkward for a while, but—well—well—she's figuring on going out this winter anyway, and—"

"'Lo, folks, how's things?"

Marta was coming up the road in her Sunday best, more peacocky than ever with a Japanese parasol that had yellow storks on it. She looked hot, her rouge channel-streaked, but the blue eyes full of smiles.

"Gosh! You could fry an egg in this sun. Where's Mary?"

"Washing up," said Ma in an odd tone, "yes, it's certainly hot."

"Feeling the heat yourself, ain't you, Mrs. Bowers?"

"No, Marta, I don't mind it."

The girl caught something, her brows went up a shade, she looked uncomfortable and turned to Harper:—

"How's the Red Jacket, Harry—any skin left on your back?"

"My back's all right, thanks."

This drew a frank stare, something was wrong; she examined them with open curiosity:—

"Strikes me the temperature's kind of low round here for August—what's the matter, folks? Oh, here's Mary."

Mary had come from the cabin, nodding, waving. Marta got to her feet all in one motion.

"Say, honey, I'm in wrong somewhere—straighten it out, will you?"

"I don't understand—wrong?"

"Your Ma and Harry are all froze up, so what's the matter?"

"What is it, Ma?"

Everything stopped for a moment—young Harper was twisting his mouth, interested in a squirrel up in the jack pine; Marta was staring from him to Ma, then back at Mary; Ma felt her face hot, the skin on it seemed to tighten.

"Marta," she blurted, "I'm downright sorry to ask, but is there a man living in your cabin—that's what I'm told?"

When she said this Marta made a queer sound, they could hear her breathe quickly. She stood very still, frowning, as though trying not to believe something, then her eyes rounded as though forced to believe it; she seemed less angry than surprised, and gave the hardest laugh one could imagine.

"Did Harry fetch the news?"

"Yes, he did."

"Well, he's right—thanks Harry," she stood punching holes in the sand with the parasol, "thanks for the kind thought. So long, folks."

With this she turned, halted, turned back; now she didn't look hurt so much as sad, and older, as though something had gone out of her. But her eyes had become soft and tender, which made Ma wonder if love, the real, deep thing, had come to her at last.

"Matter of fact, Mrs. Bowers, I came up to tell you about it, but you let out on me before I'd got in a word. That don't matter much, but what does matter is I want you, all of you, to come right over now and see him. You don't have to come, though it'd be better if you did."

The way she said this made Ma think hard; Marta didn't look or sound like a guilty woman, so she nodded with a sweep of her arm to gather in the other two. They started in a sort of procession with Marta in front and not speaking at all; the men they passed, a lot of men, touched their hats and looked interested for it wasn't often one saw three of the ten women in Richfield together.

When they reached her cabin Marta listened at the door a moment, went in and beckoned to them.

There was a single bunk on each side of the hearth; one had the blankets neatly folded and no pillow; in the other, wearing a fine linen nightshirt, lay a man of middle age with short, bristly, blue-black beard a few weeks old, his face flushed, lips swollen, his tousled head rolling on two pillows. His eyes were half open, but certainly he saw nothing; he kept mumbling in a cracked voice to someone, "Take it easy there, George, don't strain yourself, easy there now." He'd say this over and over again, wander off and come back to it, while Ma, staring at him, found the mottled features faintly familiar but couldn't place him at all till, oddly, his roving brain seemed to touch land for he stopped rambling and lay quite still and looked up as though out of another world:—

"That you, Mrs. Bowers?"

"Yes, Mr. Donald," said Ma softly, "it's me."

"I made it—the Cariboo, but George, I—he—I buried him at Maloney's Flats."

With this he slipped off again, but Marta sat beside him, put her hand on his forehead which seemed to bring him back. "All right, old timer, you take it easy now."

Evidently he knew her voice, gave her the least nod signalling the sort of unnamable understanding that comes at the very end of things, so that Ma and Mary and Harper felt they were intruders here.

"Maloney's Flats," the hollow voice took up its burden, "that's where Race Track Creek comes in—where I want to be—along with George."

"We'll fix it, old timer, we'll fix it."

This got home—somehow; he shut his eyes, seemed content. Obviously he moved away from them to reunion with the whitest Reb in the whole Southern army.

Marta stooped over him, straightened up; without words they followed her to the door, and she said:—

"Found him when I got back about three in the morning a week ago; he was lying beside a crazy sort of thing with one big wheel. The wheel was busted."

"We passed them on the way in," said Mary softly. "Oh, Marta, I'm so sorry."

"Is that so! We hoisted him in here, and I went for Doc Flattery, then the Doc located a lot of old bullet wounds in him gone bad. Said he couldn't last long anyhow, and he'd best stay right where he was if that suited me. His passage was booked, and nothing else for it. Then Lena went to live with another Hurdy—that's her bunk I'm sleeping in—when I do sleep. Next day I told Mr. Flint."

"Why didn't you tell me?" asked Ma raggedly.

"You've got your laundry and Sophy Cameron and—well—I figured we could handle it between us. What's more, Mrs. Bowers, I ain't been feeling too popular over at your place these days. This pilgrim ain't run short of anything as I know of—that's one of Mr. Flint's nightshirts on him now. He comes in every morning at sun-up when he quits faro to sit here for a while so as I can get some sleep."

"I—I see."

"Mr. Donald ain't always like this; in between times he's told me a lot about the war—he's a Northerner—I guess I know more about the battle of Bull Run than any woman west of the Missouri. That's where he got shot up."

"I'd have helped, and you know it," blurted young Harper.

She did not seem to notice this. "I'd drop off," she went on "with Mr. Flint in that chair reading poetry—he certainly knows how to read—and Mr. Donald found it kind of restful. He'd be there reading when I woke up. Then he'd wash this pilgrim before he went home. He's as good as any woman when it comes to things like that, and darned if I didn't feel like getting sick myself just to see what'd happen. Quite a few of the boys has dropped in, but none of 'em like him, and—"

The sick man's monotone broke in again while the wandering brain reverted to Maloney's Flats. Marta took his hand, held it firmly. The voice trailed to a husky murmur.

"It's ten long, tough miles," she said, "but the boys will get him there somehow. Well, Harry, I'm obliged for your kind words—now you'd better get out. Doc says he won't last till morning. There's poison all through him."

"Marta," breathed Ma, "let me—"

"That's all right, Mrs. Bowers; nothing more anybody can do now. Thanks for the visit. You too, Mary." Then with a choky little laugh, "That busted wheel is round behind the woodpile if you want to see it."

She went in and shut the door.

* * *

Mrs. Bowers tramped homeward in silence for some time, then:—

"Well, daughter?"

"Well, Ma?"

"You're kind of quiet. What's on your mind?"

"The same thing as on yours."

"I guess that's so. Where's Harry?"

"Gone off by himself."

"Said anything?"

"No, he just looked queer and started up Cow Mountain."

"Good place for him too. My eyes are kind of opened—we were all wrong about Marta."

"It's pretty hard to tell when a girl dresses like that."

"Maybe, but the outfit don't mean a thing. Marta's just plain lonely, and jumped at the chance of doing something for somebody. She earns her money by make-believe. This is the real thing—makes her feel more like other women. What's more she's in love. Time was when I thought a Hurdy was far past that, but now—"

"In love! who's the—?"

"Mr. Flint; plain as the nose on your face. I think it would work fine—they're both lonely. As for Harry, I just don't know."

"What about Harry?" asked the girl stiffly.

"Match him up against Mr. Flint, and he don't come off so well." Here Ma paused, sent her a sharp look, continued with a certain deliberation, "Harry don't make allowances, and I'll say they're needed in a place like this. Strikes me he's made to a sort of pattern, an' can't shake it off. I haven't a thing against him except that he don't seem to fit. Ever notice that?"

"Go on."

"I feel responsible to see there's nothing happens you'd be sorry for. Fact is I don't understand Britishers; I guess they don't mean it, but they make you feel there's something wrong with you for not being like them—that's just my idea."

"You're afraid I'm going to marry Harry, while I'm afraid I'm not."

"All I want is there's no mistake. You two have been herded up pretty close, and, well, there's human nature."

"Has Harry talked to you about me?"

"Not a peep out of him, and right now I wouldn't listen if he did. Daughter, you've seen for yourself there's all kinds of men in the Cariboo—five thousand of them now. Why Mr. Barker told me that six of his seven partners can read and write. The Judge says there's English lords and knights—whatever that means—but they don't want to be known as such. Maybe they're shamed. It's dead certain that the right husband for you is parading round here close by if I could only lay hands on him. Just the same I wish we were back on Telegraph Hill; there's no fortune for us in the Red Jacket."

"Ma?"

"Yes?"

"Let's have the rest of it, might as well."

"Meaning?"

"Mr. Flint. You're funny; you start to lead up to something, then branch off and finish in the air."

Mrs. Bowers, a little shaken by this sagacity, made a vague gesture:—

"What did you suppose I had about Mr. Flint?"

"You're not down on him the way you used to be; I've noticed it, so has Dan."

"That's because I'm kind of mixed."

"So am I, now," confessed Mary.

"Glad to hear it, and being a partner it's like he's in the family. Certainly he's more kinds of a man than I reckoned, though if he figures on getting out of gambling into mining there's not so much difference. It's funny feeling you can trust a gambler, though the Judge said the other day that he'd likely make a success of most anything he tried. Do you suppose they'll plant Mr. Donald in that silk nightshirt of his?"

"Ma, do you think he stole that money on the steam-boat?"

"Sometimes I do, the next minute I don't; it's pretty mysterious, but if he did he's quit stealing. A man can't sit up nights reading poetry to a dying stranger with thievery in his heart. I guess we'll just wait and see. Now you put the kettle on."

"All right, and don't you worry about me. There's lots of time, and whoever it is I'm going to be happy."

Mrs. Bowers sat for a moment very still, with troubled eyes.

"Dear God," she murmured, "don't let her ever find out who she rightly is."

* * *

Barker was figuring things out; two weeks now since he left the Judge's office with a new heart in his breast, seven

hundred dollars in his pocket; two weeks' grub for seven men at four dollars a day had cost four hundred; twenty days to walk out on two dollars a day each for grub—say two hundred and eighty! They couldn't run it any closer; either they'd quit to-night, or stick in the Cariboo—and starve.

Fifty-nine feet below the surface of Lower Williams, and little room to swing a pick; a tallow candle gutted beside him, a slow drip-drip spattered on his oilskins. On top there was a faint patch of daylight as through cloudy glass; on dull afternoons he often caught a pale star, lit before its time—like having a star all to oneself.

The air was damp, but the gravel fairly dry, so he didn't fear being flooded out: it was packed into a sort of conglomerate, a cosmic pudding mixed by giants when the world was young. Billy would stand his pick in a corner, scoop up some stuff, swirl it in the pan, find only the usual tail of black sand. When the squat, pot-bellied bucket—it had cost three hundred dollars—was three parts filled he would give one jerk at the signal cord, catch a grunt from above where four men strained at the crank handles. The bottom edge of the bucket made a grinding sound as it lifted clear and rotated slowly, so he steadied it till out of reach lest it loosen a timber on the way up, while the light lessened as though the shaft were plugged. Then a bump, a rattle, the bucket floated down to be landed in a corner. There was only room below for one man at a time, so the partners took alternate shifts of three hours, working the clock round. Eight weeks of this now, with not a grain of gold to show for it.

Shutting his mind against ugly thoughts, Barker slaved on. There were but few boulders down this far; when they did strike one too big to hoist, the only thing was to dig a chamber in the wall of the shaft, lever the mass into that, and put in a set to hold it. Except striking water from some ancient channel that was the worst about an old

river bed, and he had warned Cameron about it when a few weeks previously he started sinking higher up nearer the Little Canyon. He advised him to wait and see; but Cameron, bitten by the same bug, had a sick wife, very little money, and couldn't wait.

Another hour to go on the last shift but one! The cold fact didn't seem credible. A trickle of fine stuff escaped under the bottom set; he caught it with the shovel, dumped it into the bucket. He swung his pick. It struck something solid; the steel head jumped back, the handle vibrated in his grip; so this would be another damned boulder. Swinging to one side, he hit again at the same depth, so evidently it was no boulder but a flat slab making a false floor to the shaft, which meant more blasting, more damage to the timbering. A third time he struck. Again the same.

Now a queer fancy took him: if one did actually hit bed-rock—sixty feet had always been his guess—it would be just like that. His lips felt hot; he could not imagine that the thing was really happening but hated to disprove it, and stood for a moment feeling horribly weary till a pebble landed on the candle and it went out. With fingers that shook he nicked a sulphur match with his thumbnail, relighted it to a wet sputter that steadied into a tiny pin-point of flame. Then he drove in his shovel, working it back and forth as it scraped the big slab—or bed-rock. There were three possibilities—slab—bed-rock with nothing on it—bed-rock with—?

A sort of palsy took him; he waited so long that those on top grew anxious.

"All right down there, Billy?"

It came in muffled, cushioned waves, and he sent a shout back. His heart was in his mouth when he spilled half a shovel of bottom stuff in the pan, gave it a swirl under the candle, choked, blinked, squeezed his eyes, looked again.

Gold—gold—gold—about a quarter of the stuff was gold—gold in nuggets round and flat—gold in thin plates and wedges—gold like coarse sand—wire gold like clipped ends of thread—gold like wheat and beans!

Fire ran through him; he licked his lips. Seizing the shovel he drove it in three times, heard the stuff land in the basket with a dull, dead sound: tossing in the pan, he climbed on the rim, gripped the wire, gave a twitch so weak that nothing happened. Then another twitch and, hugging hard, he began to mount, every single set of timber looked like an old friend; up he went out of the pit with the golden floor into sunlight, the bucket swaying under four bent figures.

Level with the surface, he stepped off.

"Boys," he said thickly, "boys, we've—!"

He stuck there; could only gesture till one of the partners lifted the pan while they all stared, their mouths open like gaping children at a toyshop window. Here it was, but somehow didn't seem theirs, and for just an instant they said nothing. The gravel was slimy, the nuggets slimy, but through the slime came a scattered glow, not the glitter of pyrites, or fools' gold, but the soft, comforting complexion of the real thing. They knew this, yet somehow it wasn't substantial, it might happen to others but not to them; perhaps they had lived too close to the edge of disaster to imagine that disaster was done with. At any rate they stood there meeting each other's eyes as though for confirmation, then one by one reached down into the bucket, selected some trophy that took his fancy, examining it with startled, incredulous interest till Barker took a long breath and whispered hoarsely:—

"By God! oh, by God!"

That broke the spell: he put back his head and gave a great roar of triumph; it was joined by the rest; they reached hands to hands with laughter and shouting. One man would strike another, be struck back, great hearty

forceful blows instead of speech; they'd turn to the bucket, fork out more nuggets, wash them, set them in a row on the shaft collar where the sun made them gleam like a golden chain round the dark neck of that desperate pit.

"How much of it, Billy?" asked Dexter in a cracked tone.

"About eighteen inches just there. deeper on the average. Better tell the Judge—if it hadn't been for—"

Dexter was off, hunching shoulders, loping like a mule-deer. Near Cameron's claim he gave a wild yell, waved his hat; the gang dropped tools and ran, leaving Cameron at the bottom of his own shaft. On went Dexter beyond the Little Canyon, that damned practical joke of nature whose secret was now forever solved, on to Richfield and Upper Williams. As he ran he kept shouting, so the news spread like a bushfire before a gale; into cabin and saloon it blazed; Parsons caught it, vaulted over his counter; the Duke of York started, followed by Scotch Jenny, plaid skirts high over her massive calves; already she was planning a new hotel and dance hall near the Barker claims. Doc Flattery abandoned a patient half choked by a thermometer; Jack Lennard deserted a halfshod pony of Cataline's, boss packer of the Cariboo Trail; coat tails flying came the Rev. Sheepshanks, after him the Judge at a more leisurely pace, smiling, nodding to himself. Hurdies, gamblers, fiddlers, Johnny Knott, Dan, young Harper, Julie and Annie—this meant much to them—diggers from the Phoenix and Cunningham and Dutch Bill who had left a guard over their sluice boxes—all Richfield emptied itself downstream so that in a few moments the Barker claims were black with Argonauts, pushing, laughing, in a babel of talk. Billy was right after all. His luck was their luck. Lower Williams had made good. More years of life to the Cariboo!

7

The Passing of Sophy Cameron

MR. KNOTT was putting finishing touches to a wooden tombstone for which the inscription depended on him: he seemed restless, clawed some fine shavings from the tail of his beard, laid aside his plane, gnawed off a chew—he found this increasingly difficult—and stepped out into the sun where the heat eased his old bones.

Sound travelled clearly in that still air bringing a clatter of hammers from the new town going up on Lower Williams: day and night it had not ceased since Barker hit the pay streak and a new frenzy struck the Cariboo. Gangs were sawing lumber on Cow Mountain, he could see them clustered like flies, hear the note of their rip-saws; new buildings took shape along the creek bank; Oliver d'Orpigny was bewildered with lavish offers for the services of Barnee; Mr. Knott himself was implored to forget the stiff for a while and take general carpentry at five dollars an hour.

By general consent the new town was christened Barkerville; overnight it was born, crazy as Richfield, the same single narrow street, the same plankwalk on stilts, the only difference being that Barkerville smelled the fresher.

Nor was the electrical effect confined to the Cariboo; word sped to the Forks, Keithley, Clinton and so down to the Pacific; men on fast horses took it by daredevil trails; dejected Argonauts, trudging gloomily, backs to the Cariboo, heard it, felt the old wild hope revive, tightened pack-straps, faced northward again; tenderfeet offered reckless

terms for transport; storekeepers doubled their orders; Governor Douglas away off in Victoria got the news; British engineers, blasting a violent passage up the Fraser, sharpened their efforts.

Mr. Knott, however, remained unmoved; too often had he seen this sort of thing. He liked his trade, it had dignity, his clients didn't talk back so there were no disputes; as to his other interest in the Red Jacket, he seldom thought of it, and all that mattered at the moment was that no suitable inscription came to mind for a round-topped slab now drying in the sun.

He was frowning over this when he saw the Judge coming along.

Begbie had just dismissed his weekly Court, a short affair held with an informality that might have misled those not resident in the Cariboo. Proceedings were much to the point; mostly they dealt with disputes over claims that met with a treatment approved by all not directly involved, and rarely was there any appeal though Begbie, after giving his verdict, always left that open. For the rest of it—with one notable exception—the new gold fields were law-abiding. Thievery didn't pay. A fraction of the gold so well guarded in camp was lifted on the way out by bandits who vanished uncapturably in the bush. Murders were so infrequent as to be almost unique, and, as Begbie often said, the Americans, who now preponderated in the Crown Colony, seemed to prefer British regulations to their own or, if the liking was but apparent, thought better to keep inside them.

Thus the Judge found time to circulate, make friends, gather opinions, encourage the downhearted, curb the unruly. His human interest never flagged; he liked to visit, talk, keep his finger on the pulse of the Cariboo. And to none did he turn more sure of candid response than to Mr. Knott.

"Morning, Johnny, who's it for?"

"That tenderfoot down in Marta Zeiss' shack; Harper and a bunch of 'em are packing him out to Maloney's Flats at sunrise. Know about him?"

"Yes, I know; she was very good to him."

"That's one first-class girl. Oliver says he can't get the cart out there nohow, an' the boys'll have a tough trip. But darned if I know what to put on this headstone."

"Is it necessary to put any more than the name?"

"Maybe not, Judge, but it looks kind of cold-blooded; he's entitled to some kind of a send-off."

"Perhaps—yes—it's more in your line than mine; the one you did for Bella Hodgekinson was just right."

Johnny looked flattered. "That weren't all of it mine, Bill an' I put our heads together; he had all the facts so it was a straight story, you couldn't go wrong; everyone knew Bella. Bill lived in a steam bath, and didn't get no rest. But this pilgrim's a total stranger. Judge, I'm stuck."

"H'm—we might get something between us."

"That's what I thought."

"Does the Civil War suggest anything?—he was in that."

"Not a thing; nobody's won that war yet, an' any inscription by rights ought to have some kind of truth in it—not all the truth—no sir—that ain't fair to the deceased, but certainly just a dash of it. Judge, back east I've seen millions of them dearly beloveds that was just plain prevaricating."

"I've seen a few too," smiled Begbie. "To-morrow morning, eh? Not much time left."

"No, sir, I'm rushed. If deceased was a skunk you'd kind of clear yourself with a word or two about what he didn't do, and where he come from, and sidestep the rest, but from all accounts this Donald weren't no skunk; he fought at Bull Run, and pushed a two-man barrow in here from Yale with his pardner."

"I'm told that he pushed his partner too."

"That's right, he did. I was for putting the barrow

right on top of the grave to speak for itself, but the darn thing's all in splinters. Say, I've just hit something. *He made the Cariboo—that's all.* How about it?"

"Just right, I think. And the Red Jacket?"

"Same as ever except we got a new partner."

"Who's that?"

"Party called Lemuel Flint. You know of him?"

"I do," smiled Begbie, more interested than he showed. "How came that about?"

"Judge, you can search me. Seems this gambler wanted to chip in, and put it up to Sing, and Sing told him all comers were welcome so far as he was concerned, and Dan allowed he felt the same way."

"And you, Johnny?"

"Right now I can do with a little less luxury. Course there's nothing there—never was except this first nugget"—opening the casket he fingered the yellow lump, shook his grey head—"and never will be. I surmised to this party he wouldn't get the same odds as with a faro deck an' he'd lose money quicker'n he could make it in the Hotel de France, but this don't disturb him any. Judge, that gravel heap is getting all wore out with human hopes; there's five more men on it right now, that's where the fifteen hundred comes in."

"Mr. Flint's gambling instinct is in action, eh?"

"Mebbe."

Begbie had not quite meant what his words conveyed. Putting this latest move with what he had already learned about Mr. Flint made it resemble an act of restitution. Fifteen hundred dollars was a significant figure.

"Johnny, I think you've gathered in a desirable partner."

"He's got nerve in him if that's what you mean." Mr. Knott's skinny hand grasped his paintbrush like a claw as it lingered over the last 'o' in *Cariboo*, and his grey eyes twinkled. "That money weren't in no way what you'd call life savings, so I guess he won't miss it."

"Where there's gravel there's always hope. Billy Barker was justified."

"Yes, I guess so, and you too. Feel like taking a hand on the Red Jacket?"

"No thanks; and Billy paid back the seven hundred from the first bucket-load out of the pay streak."

"Well, Judge, if I was round fifty years younger maybe I'd ha' taken the same chance. Most everybody here is crazy except you an' me. The Cariboo is just one darn asylum. There's Jack Cameron banking on the same luck, and him half a mile away."

"Jack was offered ten thousand for his claim yesterday, and refused it."

"With his woman dying right under his eyes, and him near broke! Ain't that crazy?"

"She wouldn't let him take it," said Begbie quietly, "told him to hang on and dig. You can't reason such things out, but it's these crazy folk who break in the country, make it fit for other folk to live in, yet generally get nothing out of it themselves. And you Americans! Canada is going to owe you a lot for what's going on now."

"I guess we can export all the lunatics you've room for. As for thinking, I quit long ago, but when I break in round seven feet by three of the Cariboo it's fifty dollars, cash in advance. That's about all I know."

"Under the circumstances perhaps enough." Begbie took out his pocketbook. "Here's the fifty for Mrs. Cameron when the day comes—that's between you and me. Now what about this Northerner—had he any money?"

"Oh; him." Mr. Knott set his jaws to work with the half grinding, half sliding action he had long since found most effective. "No, he died broke, but that's all fixed."

"By whom?"

"New partner on the Red Jacket; he dropped in here at sun-up, passed the time of day, gave me the measurement, and put up the cash. Solong, Judge."

Walking on to the Bowers' cabin, Begbie found Ma filling a dinner pail, Mary watering nasturtiums; two wash-tubs were upside down near the door, the clothesline hung bare, a sort of calm pervaded the place, and Ma looked grave.

"Mrs. Bowers," said he, "for once I don't find you two over those tubs."

"No, Judge, that's all done with except one or two customers like Mr. Flint and Mr. Barker; what with the price of soap, an' starch, an' those Chinamen it just ain't good enough."

"I feared that might happen."

"It's happened all right, so we're looking round for something else. I'm not worrying; Dan got a little black sand on the Jacket yesterday, and what with this new town building and the rush coming next spring something's sure to turn up. I'd a mind to start a restaurant."

"When we got to working it out it needed two thousand dollars," said Mary.

"That's what we haven't got. Too late in the season anyway. Here's the pail, daughter, you get along. Cup of tea, Judge, before I empty this kettle?"

"Not just now, thanks."

"Care to walk up the road a piece? I'm due at Mrs. Cameron's."

"I should like to walk with you. Anything to carry?"

"Not this time; fact is I won't be taking much else up there—it's pretty near over. I thought she was going last week."

"So did Doctor Flattery."

"Then when she heard about Mr. Barker's strike she gingered right up—only for a day or two. 'Twouldn't surprise me if this was my last visit—but one."

"She's a brave woman," said he. "You got here at the right time for her."

"Shucks! I ain't done a thing. Judge, do you suppose

a person knows any more just before they die—can they see any further?”

“Some people think so. Why do you ask?”

“She has that look in her eyes. Round two weeks ago, that’s before the strike—she said, ‘Don’t you let Jack quit after I’m gone—make him hang on—he’s right on top of it—it’s quite a piece down yet, but it’s there—I know it is.’ That’s what she said, and I asked how she knew, but she wouldn’t tell me—she just knew.”

“It may be so, Mrs. Bowers. Who can tell?”

“Well, that day when there was all the shouting and kickup on the Barker claim I was with her, and she heard it, and understood right away and looked up at me and smiled and said, ‘What did I say, but why doesn’t Jack come?’ It was quite a while before he did come because the boys ran off and left him down the shaft, and there was no ladder, so he was stuck till they remembered and hustled back. Now what do you make of that?”

“I can’t answer you, Mrs. Bowers, but there’s a saying that there are more things in heaven and earth than are dreamed of in our philosophy.”

“I guess that’s right too—who said it?”

“A wise man.”

“I’d like to meet him.” She hesitated a moment, sent him a sidelong look, then— “Say Judge, tell me something about a warrant.”

“Warrant? What on earth has that to do with you?”

“I’m just curious; supposing one was issued back east about eighteen years ago, would it be any good here?”

“An American warrant?”

“Sure, issued in Ohio, but they didn’t catch him.”

Begbie, remembering a recent confidence, guessed at her thoughts. “No, it wouldn’t have any effect in Canada, but if it was still unexecuted, and contained a criminal charge, and the American authorities asked our assistance, we would

act. There's a sort of free trade in criminals between your country and ours."

"The one I'm thinking of was criminal all right," said Ma. "This fellow shot a man, left him half dead, and got away with his bankroll."

"In such a case we'd certainly assist if called on—or try to."

"Thanks, that's what I wanted to know."

She fell silent, so occupied with her own reflections that she seemed to forget his company. She felt safe with him. There were a lot of things surging up in her that she wanted to unload when they'd straightened out in her mind; of late she'd had a feeling she'd been settling matters too much for other folks without consulting them, been too content with her own judgment. Dan often told her she kept her instincts on springs—when she thought anything needed handling she'd jump at it like a hound dog after a coyote; she'd argue the only reason anyone had for doing things was what they felt at the time, though afterwards they might feel quite different and the reason wouldn't look so good, but that couldn't be helped. It was life.

To-day she was hiding things from her own family, which never had happened before—most likely she'd thrown away that two hundred; Dan seemed content to spend his days forking over a heap of barren gravel—largely her doing; they were sold out on Telegraph Hill—just to humour Dan she hadn't opposed this; there was that criminal Pa of Mary's parading round with a lot of their money, and winter coming on: these were facts you couldn't get away from. She, Bessie Bowers, was responsible, and it made no difference that she'd meant well.

"Judge," she said presently, "I'm kind of stupid to-day, sort of tired inside, though maybe we're better off than some others."

"Than thousands of others, Mrs. Bowers; Johnny and I were speaking along those lines a while ago."

Cariboo Road

"It don't make me thankful, but just sorry for 'em. I guess I'm in wrong somewhere."

"Mrs. Cameron wouldn't agree with that, and—", he stopped, turned. A thud of hoofs was drumming the soft road behind them where four armed men on quick-footed, long-maned Indian ponies came at an easy tilting canter—big bearded men who might have been on rocking horses and dwarfed the rough-coated beasts they rode; they had rifles across their saddlebows, revolvers in their belts. Then came twelve mules at a shuffling trot; these had leather saddlepacks and wide belly bands with no other load; the packs looked flat and half empty yet hung heavily and flapped against the brown sides. Following were three more with camp outfit and another four armed men. There was a creak of leather, slap-slap of saddle bags; the men looked solemn and were not talking. Ma stepped aside. When the men saw the Judge they saluted and pushed on in a cloud of slow-curling dust along the new road, the north end of the new Cariboo Road, cut by the south side of Jack of Clubs Lake.

"Gold escort," said Begbie approvingly, "each of those mules carries a hundred pounds of it, nearly a quarter of a million dollars between them. One week to Yale. This lot will get there in spite of Mr. Michael Trupp."

"This lot—why this lot?"

"It's safe, but expensive for the digger; too many of them chance it and take out their own gold. Mr. Trupp knows that, and bides his time; but," he added, "no man can remain invisible—not even in the Cariboo."

Ma nodded. Again she pushed back the strange idea that had been stirring in her since one night on the Fraser River, but it was the kind that kept coming back however hard one pushed.

"I guess you're right," she hazarded. "You never found out anything about that murder back at the Forks, did you?"

"Not yet, Mrs. Bowers, but he'll make a slip presently, though I admit that Mr. Trupp, which I fancy is not his real name, is an artist in crime. What do you make of the gold shipment?"

"It just don't seem real."

"Yet those pouches with the news of Barker's strike mean a rush next spring bigger than anything we've had yet. You won't know the country."

"Judge," she answered soberly, "I'm hoping I won't be here to know it, but that's private. Are you coming in to visit Mrs. Cameron?"

"If you think she's strong enough."

"Suppose you just wait a minute."

She found Sophy lying very still, her features a waxen mask, eyes wide, clear and expectant as though she waited for something, as indeed she did; meantime she listened to the confusion of sound from Lower Williams. She lifted a skeleton hand, smiled faintly, gave the slightest nod not only of welcome but as though to say, "there—you hear it—what did I tell you?" Then the smile faded; she didn't speak, and a sort of greyiness crept into her face.

Ma saw that as she stooped over her, and went out quickly to find the Judge sitting on a stump looking contentedly at the bustle beneath him. Already some forty claims had come to life; a whole row of shafts begun below the Little Canyon following what was reckoned to be the run of the buried creek bed. It carried on, Barker's claim in the middle of it, past Cameron's a half mile further down to where Lower Williams lost itself in a wide meadow of wild hay.

"Judge," said Ma tersely, "you'd better get Jack up here—she's going fast."

It wasn't necessary to get him for Cameron had been watching the cabin all morning; when Begbie waved he dropped his shovel, toiled up, panting, met Ma's grave

eyes, and went in. One glance told all; he took the cold thin hand, pressing it gently between big, warm palms.

"How is it, wife?"

"You can see, Jack," the whisper took nearly all the life she had saved for their farewell.

"No—no," he protested, "you're just all tired out." He had said this so often that he almost believed it—and didn't.

"I'm going now."

There was no answer; his brain was crowded. No complaints ever—month after weary month she had sustained him with a frail fortitude that never wavered, infusing the strength of his big body with that of her own rare spirit, and now when it was ending, he recognized a quality superior to his own. Why had he dragged her north to the Cariboo? But he hadn't dragged her! She wouldn't stay behind.

"Jack."

"Yes, Sophy?"

"Put your head close—there—like that. I'm not afraid; no use asking yourself those questions; we've had a good time together."

It nearly broke him; he didn't know what to do or say, so put a tin cup of water to her lips, but she signed it away. "You'll strike it too; I wasn't quite sure of that till a little while ago, but now I know. There'll be lots of it."

"Sure," he said shakily, "I'll strike it—that's what we're here for."

"Don't sell out before you do."

"I won't—I've promised that."

She seemed pleased then: "You'll thank everyone—Mrs. Bowers—the Judge—Doc Flattery—everybody?"

"I will, Sophy."

Now she was silent so long that he thought she had passed, and he looked mutely about at the hard mud floor criss-crossed with cracks, the blackened hearth, the shelf of tin dishes. How mean it all was—this prison that would

keep her no longer. He remembered how dainty she had always been in her ways at home, everything about her clean and fresh; how she liked snowy linen, shining glass, flowers, and used to wear narrow little white cuffs and a lace collar she'd crocheted herself.

"Jack!"

"What is it, wife?"

"When you've struck it, but not till then, I want to be buried in Cornwall."

That left him dumb. Cornwall—the home town in Ontario four thousand miles away!

"I'll go happy if you promise; don't leave me here with all those men, and Bella the only other woman! It's too lonely, too far from our own folks, especially in winter."

His heart was smothered in a wave of tenderness that choked him; why was this allowed to happen? A thousand things he wanted to do for her, but all too late, and this the very first she had ever asked all for herself.

"I'll do it, Sophy, I promise—anything else?"

There was nothing more. She had come to the finish of the long, long trail and gazed up at him with so calm a look of love and peace that just for a moment he was transported with her beyond all suffering and parting. It was as though she, knowing the way, was going ahead and would wait for him at the other end where the glint of quiet waters promised rest for the weary.

"Jack," she breathed, "hold me—hold me."

8

Mr. Flint Becomes an Altruist

BRIGHT gleamed the lamps of the Hotel de France on the night when Scotch Jenny celebrated the Barker discovery: it was a party for such personal friends as cared to attend; she had many friends, and they all cared; no questions would be asked; drinks were free to those personally recognizable by the Duke; the affair would last so long as a fiddler could swing his bow. To Mr. Lemuel Flint an occasion such as this was like an invitation to rest in a patch of ripe melons. He was well and favourably known to Jenny; from the day of his arrival he had occupied one of her best rooms at ten dollars a day, and kept it in perfect order. He was invariably polite, and had a running acquaintance with the works of her favourite poet, Mr. Robert Burns, that made him more than ever acceptable. True, he drank only sarsaparilla, he did not smoke but bought quantities of the best Manilla cigars, and this abstention coupled with his careful dress, fine linen and manner of slightly mournful dignity gave the hostelry a touch of distinction not found elsewhere in the town of Richfield. To see Mr. Flint sunning himself in sartorial perfection in one of the wooden armchairs ranged in front of the hotel, to listen to his conversation—the aptness of his frequent quotations, was to realize that here sat no ordinary man. No one had yet caught him out, and he did not propose that anyone should.

Daylight gambling offered no attraction—he always thought it cold and crude—but when the yellow lamps were lit, the air heavy with a murk of smoke, vibrant with

resonant voices—when the fiddles squeaked, Hurdies pranced, and heavily booted feet made the floorboards jump—that brought inspiration. Such an atmosphere tuned one's faculties to their highest pitch, made the supple fingers more than ever adroit.

To-night from where Lemuel sat at his usual table with the faro deck—it was a half yard of thick red silk with the spade suit stamped in blue—you could see most of the notables. Cataline was there throwing knives round a Chinaman, his trusted comprador, who stood frozen against the wall while whizzing blades outlined his body an inch from the flesh, and stuck trembling. Cataline would jerk a few with a flick of his wrist, swallow half a drink, pour the rest over the long, thick hair that fell to his shoulders. When leaving Yale with his mule train he always bought a stiff white-bosomed shirt and wore it till he got back.

You'd see a couple of lucky ones, say from Canadian Creek, dump two buckskin pokes in front of the Duke; he'd reach under the counter for his scales, empty the pokes, give two sharp knocks on the partition at the back of the bar; Scotch Jenny'd come from her private room, give a laugh like a horse and say, "Hello, boys, when's this thing going to stop?" Then she'd check the weights, shovelling up the stuff with a flat-nosed tea scoop she'd got from Parsons, the American storekeeper, and open the strong box; it was made of quarter-inch boiler plate, bolted to the floor. When she did this you'd see wads of green-backs, mounds of other pokes each with a little label. Then she'd stow away the new gold, start counting out bills—it might be three thousand dollars—relock the box and go back, and pick up *The Bride of Lammermoor*. It took a year to read; she'd been through it five times on the principle that if you struck something good you might better stay with it.

Billy Barker was there as guest of honour, with Dexter,

one of the partners. Billy sat on the bar swinging his feet. When a digger came up with his poke Billy would look sideways, pick out the biggest nugget—perhaps the size of an acorn—say, “Not so bad for Grouse or Lowhee, or whatever it is,” then fish in his pocket and flash a lump like a duck’s egg and chuckle, “That’s about the average on Lower Williams. Stick to it, you fellows, you’ll strike something yet.” Everyone would laugh, and Billy would jump down, grab a Hurdy and sling her pretty near to the ceiling, he being one of the strong men in camp, while she screamed and held down her skirts. After that he’d go back to the bar, swing his feet again, and sing:—

“They danced all nicht in dresses licht
Frae late until the eairly, O!
But, ah, their hairts were hard as flint
Which vexed the laddies sairly, O!”

Johnny was there with Dan in tow: Dan had had a couple of drinks, felt hopeful about the Red Jacket, and hung round near the bar as though mesmerized, watching the stuff being weighed. Johnny kept circulating hearing talk about the new Cariboo Road, and stages right through to Richfield; he didn’t talk much himself, but made a lot of mental notes.

Jack Lennard was there doing feats of strength; his fingers were short, thick, hard; he’d pinch an American quarter, fold it over like it was cardboard, then challenge all comers to straighten it out.

All the time gold kept coming in at sixteen dollars an ounce, three or four hundredweight of it; you’d see a Hurdy dash for the door to stand gulping fresh air; men sat outside on the plank walk, shoulder to shoulder like blackbirds on a telegraph wire, legs dangling over the street. There was a full moon that night so the Cariboo was lit with a pale radiance: if you’d been up on Cow Mountain, the rows of board buildings with their flat

fronts and small incarnadined windows would have looked like dolls' houses with candles burning inside.

Since first he started operations, Lemuel had the use of a small room that opened off the main dancing floor: it was ideal for his purpose, and from where he sat he could see the whole length of the bar. This suited him well. Disliking crowds of spectators, objecting to having his elbow jostled at just the wrong moment, he thus secured desirable seclusion for the practice of his art and the study of human nature, which, he maintained, were essentially identical.

Behind him was another door leading outside. This too was welcome for when his luck lagged or business dragged, or he was siezed, as often, by the desire to commune with himself, he would step out under the stars, clear his lungs of smoke and lampreek, contemplate nature, then return to action more deft, apt and engaging than ever. Affable to a degree, there were moments when he wanted to be alone.

Of late this had been growing on him, and after much introspection he connected it with a episode on the *Brother Jonathan* when he saw a camel devour the hat of a pulchritudinous damsel unknown to him. Still more significant was the discovery that this maiden was daughter to a stranger he had recently robbed. Mr. Flint had never forgotten the spiritual revulsion caused by that discovery, or the lightning flash revealing that for the very first time he was in love. But what could one like himself do about it?

Secretly the condition intensified, and the contrast between Mary and other young women in the camp made it the more acute. Never could he undo what was done, never escape his own condemnation, but often in early morning when grey dawn extinguished the lights of the Hotel de France, he would take a little pasear round by the Bowers cabin, and stand contemplating the moss-chinked log walls

that housed something greatly desired, but far beyond reach.

His investment, as he termed it, in the Red Jacket was as Mrs. Bowers shrewdly suspected an act of restitution, but she did not fathom what lay behind that. Mr. Flint was now partner to the father of the girl he loved. To-day he deplored the fact that his calling in life was one of which she did not approve, and since that could not be remedied, at least not right now, the best thing he could do was to give his higher instincts full play. This took him to Marta's cabin, took him to Johnny Knott, took him often to the Red Jacket where his apparent confidence in that tortured gravel heap—in which he had no faith whatever—did much to maintain the confidence of the others.

On the night of the Barker celebration, Lemuel was seated at his usual table with Mr. Cy Haskins from the American River, also a gambler, but of the tin horn type and lacking in art. He thought little of Mr. Haskins, whose co-operation was only invited when advisable. They were apparently, but only apparently, at faro, this being to establish the desired effect as visible from the main floor. Real business should start at any moment.

During a pause Lemuel glanced along the bar and noted the figures of his two partners. This was a surprise. Not before had he seen them together in the Hotel de France, and rightly concluded that the celebration and free drinks were irresistible.

For a moment he hesitated, then because there was nothing in the rules that forbade a man getting some of his own back even from a partner and parent of the girl he loved, Lemuel waved an invitational hand. After a little uncertainty the two came in. Mr. Knott wore an expression of childlike innocence, Dan's face was flushed. Mr. Haskins allowed that he was pleased to meet them, and enquired how the partnership was going.

Dan said, "Fine, just fine, and we are pretty near bed-

rock, with fortune practically in sight." Lemuel asked for Mr. Knott's health, and Johnny stated that was first-class, but he found the death rate in Richfield kind of disappointing, though the town was all right. Then Lemuel, having enquired about the Bowers ladies, lifted an eyebrow at Haskins who suggested a little game. He himself was no player, he explained, but liked the diversion if the game kept friendly. At this, Lemuel invited his partners to make four, and the drinks were on him. They wouldn't mind if he took sarsaparilla.

Mr. Knott said he'd come in if they kept her low—he didn't play faro, which was a ringtailed robbery anyway. Lemuel, folding up the lay-out, said, "Low as you like; it isn't the money that appeals to me, but the pleasure of the thing." Mr. Knott then allowed that money was like work, if you had it you were scared you'd lose it—if you hadn't you got down-hearted.

The appearance of Mr. Haskins, who had a wall eye and crooked mouth was unattractive, and Dan was holding back when he caught from Mr. Knott a faint gleam that could not be misread, and certainly he needed some kind of relaxation. Then Lemuel suggested poker. The game started, kept nice and friendly, and presently the two were seventy-five dollars ahead.

Dan, yielding to the influence of warmth and laughter and prancing feet, had a couple more drinks. Mr. Knott was playing like a greenhorn as though he'd never seen a card before; he'd claw his beard, count flies on the ceiling, make a bid at random; he'd look at Lemuel in admiration for the way he shuffled and dealt. It was in one of these fits of abstraction that he picked up his hand, one eyelid gave the slightest quiver, and Dan's right foot got a distinct pressure. The bidding had started when Johnny took another look at his hand and asked, "Who cut?"

Mr. Haskins said he'd cut; Johnny said to Lemuel, "You dealt, didn't you?" Lemuel said, "Yes, I dealt." Then

Cariboo Road

Johnny laid down four queens, got up, gave a cackle like an old hen and said, "I pass—come along, Dan," and Dan followed like he was in the bight of a wire rope.

"With four queens in your hand why did you break it off like that?" he asked.

Mr. Knott regarded him with childlike eyes. "You came from Frisco?"

"Sure I did."

"Ever play any poker?"

"Not much—couldn't afford it."

"You were darn right—you couldn't. We'd made seventy-five dollars—here's your end of it—and them four queens startled me for a minute till I seen through 'em. Follow me?"

"Go on!"

"They were meant to upset my ekilibrium an' pretty near did. Flint saw that all right. Now I was going to open her for a hundred when a little bird chirps to me—'you darn fool, he has four kings waiting for you right now, or maybe aces'—so I just naturally fade out. See?"

Dan laughed. The old man was always surprising him with dry revelations of cynical wisdom that, like evaporated apples, held the pith and stored flavour of days gone by.

"I don't think he'd have tried that; he's been a good friend."

"You're kind of short on human experience. There ain't no friendship in poker, 'tain't that kind of game."

"Maybe—"

"Flint is pretty smart, but he's heading for trouble. If I were him I'd quit cards and get married."

"Who'd marry him anyway?"

"There's Marta Zeiss for one."

"Nothing in that, Johnny, not a thing."

"Dan, if a thing don't set right in front of you, you kind of miss it. I know what I'm talking about."

"Marta isn't for marriage."

"Them two rode mules an' Indian ponies together four hundred miles, didn't they?"

"Yes, but—"

"I've seen folk hitch up on a darn sight less provocation. Ever notice that casket shop of mine is a sort of reception bureau?"

"I guess you're right."

"All kind of folks keep stopping in from the Judge down just to pass the time of day. Maybe it's the sight of the tombstones makes 'em loosen up, anyway that's how I know about Miss Zeiss. She comes along about two weeks ago and sits down and starts in."

"On Flint?"

"Sure. She thinks he's high class, likes his manners, his clothes, the way he talks poetry—never spent a cent on her but that don't make any difference."

"She won't get him, Johnny, he isn't that sort."

"Dunno, but—well—a lot of those girls are bound to marry. Agin nature if they don't. Yes, sir, I guess their children's children won't be any museum pieces round this country later on. Anyway your friend Flint is doing a little hard thinking right now."

This was true. They had left a silence behind them with Lemuel frowning at the four kings in his own hand; something had gone wrong, he couldn't figure what; it wasn't the seventy-five—he usually began that way to get things moving—but something more important; it disturbed him, made one question one's own skill. "Darned if I understand it," he murmured, and asked Haskins, but Haskins hadn't noticed anything either, and maybe Johnny knew more about poker than he let on.

Mr. Haskins had sauntered out on another prospecting trip, and a moment later Lemuel heard the door behind him open and close very gently; then a man he had not seen before stepped round with a tread like a cat, and took the chair opposite, his back to the hall.

Lemuel, experiencing an odd thrill, did not move, and regarded the stranger with a curiosity that gradually changed to a vague discomfort. The man was of middle height, his shoulders had a marked slope. He was clean-shaven with a broad forehead and a sort of wedge-shaped face that tapered to a small, strong chin. His mouth was wide and firm with thin relentless lips, his eyes of the blue-grey colour taken by hot steel when the smith lifts it from the tempering bath.

"Name of Hollis," said he, "Jim Hollis of Sacramento."

Lemuel nodded, but did not like this—a poor opening with nothing attractive about it—no pleasantries—and he did not like playing with a stranger whose manner was, to say the least, forbidding. But business remained business, and it was not his habit to decline a challenge.

"Why certainly, Mr. Hollis. I guess we haven't met before. What shall it be?"

"Faro."

This at least was welcome, for at faro Mr. Flint's supple fingers exercised their greatest skill. When thus engaged you place your bet on the lay-out—in this case it presented the suit of spades—where you fancy, and the dealer draws two cards from his complete and presumably well-shuffled pack, making one turn. These cards are—or should be, though they not always are—the second and third from the top while the rest remain—or should remain—undisturbed. Thus, two at a time, fifty cards are drawn exhausting the pack. If you bet on a three and a three is drawn, you make ten times your bet. If a pair of three's emerges, the dealer takes half your bet.

If you knew Lemuel well enough, and there was no one else round, he'd draw any card you cared to mention. In public he'd never let on that he wanted to play but hung back till it seemed he just couldn't get out of it. If you put a couple of his cards under a glass you could hardly say where they were marked, and he never got impatient.

"Well," snapped Mr. Hollis, "what are you waiting for?"

Lemuel liked this still less, nor did he admire the aspect of the stranger which struck him as somehow ominous, so he resolved to skin the man without mercy.

Now it developed that Mr. Hollis, who apparently had ideas of his own about faro, bet only on the queen—always the queen; he'd stake twenty dollars a time, and somehow each time he lost. But this made no difference, he'd only peel off another twenty and dart at Lemuel a mocking look as though daring him to hold back the queens any longer. Presently this got more and more difficult, for if the game reached the twenty-third turn—which Mr. Flint prayed it might not—the four cards left would be all queens. What made things worse, Mr. Hollis knew this too.

Suddenly he stripped off three one hundred dollar bills and laid them on the queen.

"Didn't mention any limit, did you?"

Lemuel moistened his lips. To his certain knowledge the next card to be drawn—or that should be drawn—was a queen; his total assets were twenty-five hundred; if he lost he'd lose three thousand.

"Why, no," he said coolly, "there's no limit."

Then with the speed of lightning he flipped over two cards—ten and four.

In the same instant the stranger's arm shot out; something gleamed, and Lemuel gave a frightful scream.

His hand was pinned flat to the table by a long, thin-bladed knife. Beneath it, transfixed, lay the queen of spades.

"Thought so," growled Hollis, "been waiting for that."

* * *

Half an hour later Dan was telling the family about it:—

The knife went right through the table—quite a job getting it out and not making a bigger hole in his hand. He was in a swoon, and didn't come round for quite a

while. The other fellow had lit out by the back door. I guess he didn't have time to take Lemuel's roll with him—that was right in his pants' pocket."

"Who did it, Dan?"

"Nobody knows—yet; whoever it was got clean away."

"But Mr. Flint must know."

"Sure he does, but he hasn't said a word. Sort of stunned I guess, and keeps staring at his hand like he was mesmerised."

"Where is he now?"

"Up in his room. Doc Flattery's there with Marta helping. I guess he's in a pretty bad way with that hand—it's the right one."

"Dan, I'm going there now."

"You can't do anything, mother, and it's late."

"I don't care how late. Mary, you stay where you are. Come on, Dan."

Ma's thoughts as she trudged downhill in the dark were too confused for expression. Between herself and Lemuel there had grown of late a sort of understanding that did not seem to suffer by reason of his occupation. He had, she thought, an engaging combination of male nerve and feminine intuition, and was quite unlike any other man she had ever known. She felt like mothering him, and it was a pitiable thing to picture him crippled.

Reaching the room—the first time Ma had ever set foot in the Hotel de Fance—they found him alone with the bandaged hand supported by a sling that went round his neck. Agony was invading arm and shoulder, his face grey with pain.

"Why, Mrs. Bowers, this is certainly kind of you," he said shakily.

"I'm just more sorry than I can tell. What's Doc Flattery think about it?"

"He don't rightly know yet—some nerve's been cut. He says we have to wait till she starts to heal so long as

there's no poison in it. He don't reckon that knife was too clean."

Mrs. Bowers, remembering the Northerner in Marta's cabin, shook her head.

"Now Mr. Flint, don't you entertain such an idea for a minute. Just take care of yourself and get round again."

Lemuel gave her a look of despair and she perceived that the knife of the unknown had inflicted more than physical mutilation. Dan hadn't got this far; he merely saw a wounded man with whom he sympathised while Ma caught in the dark eyes something that went straight to her heart.

"Dan, you'd better wait downstairs. I want a little talk with Mr. Flint."

"There's something more," she said, putting her chair closer, "so tell me all you've a mind to—I'll understand."

In the pause that followed she could feel the Hotel de France vibrating to the pounding of the Argonauts' heavy-booted feet, the raucous strain of fiddles came in clearly, down on the street was shouting and laughter. Now she thought Lemuel looked like an old man whose sunken eyes were fixed on something gruesome that gradually neared him, and this indeed was true for the whole deft facade of life had fallen in, the former Lemuel was obliterated, and there remained only a hell of pain and shattered pride through which moved a maimed and broken gambler. This disillusionment was harder than any suffering.

"It might do you good to say more," she repeated gently, "'tain't natural to keep it all locked up. Who did it, Mr. Flint? The boys all want to know, Dan tells me, so's they can get after him. You've a heap of friends right here in Richfield."

That did help a little; now he would need friends as never before, and Ma's honest eyes signalled that here stood the best of all—and in spite of the past.

Then, slowly, forcing it out, he began, while her steady gaze never left him.

"When the man came in—that was the back door—and I didn't know him—he allowed he wanted faro, and—"

"What'd he look like?"

"Towards middle height, moved easy, had sloping shoulders and—"

"Eh!"

"Sloping shoulders, pretty hard grey eyes and—"

"Oh God!" breathed Ma.

"What's the matter, Mrs. Bowers?"

"Nothing—that is—go right on." Her heart had nearly stopped.

"His mouth pretty wide and tight. Gave the name of Hollis—Jim Hollis of Sacra—"

Mrs. Bowers moved blindly to the window, gazed out at the struggling lights of Richfield. Her brain whirled. So long she remained there that Lemuel got up and stood beside her.

"What's wrong, ma'am?"

"That ain't Jim Hollis—it's our Mary's father," she said in a hard tone, "our Mary's father—Steve Bowers—Dan's no-account cousin. What's more, I take it he's Michael Trupp."

That struck him silent.

"Mr. Flint," the voice was ragged, "I've just got to tell you."

Lemuel listened in a sort of daze; it sounded incredible, yet he knew it was true, and in the middle of the story he seemed to catch a sort of light where before was only darkness. He could not understand this, but no doubt about the light.

"Have you told anyone else what the man was like?"

"No, ma'am, not yet," and he was thankful he hadn't for this seemed somehow connected with the light, "I don't feel like talking to Doc Flattery, but Sergeant Lindsay will be round presently and I guess—"

"Mr. Flint," said she in a half whisper, "suppose I said

to you that if Steve Bowers, which is his real name, is arrested for this—and what's more there's an old warrant out for murder back east—it'll just break our Mary's heart. Suppose I said that, what'd you say? Does it sound crazy?"

At this, and all of a sudden, Lemuel knew what the light meant by glinting like a distant star down the pit into which he had fallen. He had heard hard rock miners say that often from the black bottom of a deep shaft they could see a star in daytime, and now with himself when life was at its darkest it was something like that, so he looked down into Ma's troubled, frightened eyes, and with one of his old, grave smiles said:—

"Why no, ma'am, that's not anyway crazy. You just leave it to me. She'll never know, or anyone else."

* * *

"Well, Mr. Flint, I'm sorry to see you in this shape; it's more like Stanleytown than Richfield. Now what can you tell me?"

"There's not much, Judge and that's a fact."

The wound was burning like fire, but Lemuel's voice was steady. The Duke had shaved him that morning, and the bandaged hand in its sling added to the interest of his appearance. "It all happened in no time at all."

"So I understand, but what details about the man?"

"It was this way, sir. Right from the start I could see that he was set to break me: that got me sort of vexed, no satisfaction at all, so I kind of arranged things to suit myself. This party was betting queens straight through, while naturally I was holding 'em back till pretty soon I was sort of crowded with 'em. Then this party lays three hundred on the lady—six fifties—they'd all been tens before—and I run the queen of spades into a siding. That's when he got busy."

"He had plenty of money?"

"Yes sir, plenty."

Cariboo Road

"Had you ever seen this person before? Think hard."

"No, sir."

"And his name?"

"Judge, when a party sits in at the pasteboards he don't have to give his name. This one didn't."

"I see. Describe him as accurately as you can."

There had in the past been moments when Lemuel's very life hung on his powers of dissimulation, but none had taxed him so greatly as now when he met Begbie's eyes and realised he was lying to a man he liked and respected, for the sake of a damsel who, he admitted, was far beyond reach. It was mad, crazy, sentimental to the point of folly. Were the truth discovered, as well it might be, his reputation with the highest authority in the land was ruined for all time. And yet—!

"Well, Judge, he was short and broad, carried black sidewhiskers with a sort of blue in the black—pug nose and black eyes. I'd say he was round fifty, maybe more. Square shoulders, and kind of slow and heavy in his movements."

"H'm! A good many in the Cariboo not unlike him."

"That's right, sir, quite a few—pretty easy to lose in a crowd."

"You see, Mr. Flint, from what has reached me of this affair it might be the work of a certain Michael Trupp, but what you tell me of his appearance does not fit with the little I know about the man, while on the other hand this sudden attack and complete disappearance is, from his past record, exactly what one might expect. He is a public menace, the reward for his arrest is now three thousand dollars—a good deal of money even in the Cariboo—and we are anxious to put Mr. Trupp where he should be—at the end of a rope."

Lemuel felt himself going deeper and deeper. Part of him, revolting, was about to burst out with the truth, follow what might, while the other part warned that already he had lied beyond redemption, and in his crippled palm

Mr. Flint Becomes an Altruist

lay the future happiness of the girl he loved. So now there was but one thing for it, and he himself did not matter.

"And you are certain that none but yourself saw this man last night?" concluded the Judge.

"I guess not, sir. I hadn't been alone in the room a minute when this party shows up by the back door. Seems he'd been laying for me. Then it happened as I told you. I sort of passed out for a while, and when I came round there was quite a crowd, and they'd got the knife out."

"I see. Sergeant!"

Lindsay stepped in. "Yes, sir?"

"I'm giving you this description of last night's offender"—Begbie wrote fast in a large, firm script—"with an offer of five hundred dollars reward. I thought it might be our friend Trupp again, but—" here he paused, and Lemuel caught the meaning of the pause—"it seems not. Put this up in the post office, and a copy in Parsons' store."

Lindsay, saluting, went on.

"Well, Mr. Flint, we can but wait and see. Now it is not my habit to enter upon the private affairs of others except when my duties require it, but in your case I propose to make an exception. Do you mind?"

Lemuel, wondering what was coming next, made a courtly gesture.

"Judge, that's downright kind of you. I ain't in what you'd call good shape, but anything you say is certainly welcome."

"Thank you. Do I understand that your—er—professional career is over?"

"Yes sir, it is; I've quit for good. Doc says if there's any poison he'll have to take the hand right off—if there ain't, three fingers are set to stiffen up like they were claws. I'll never deal another card."

"So I imagined, but perhaps in the long run you may not regret this. Your brain, Mr. Flint, strikes me as deserving

have not been fair to yourself. If at any time I can help you, I am ready. Good morning."

When he was alone, Begbie sat for a moment, very thoughtful.

"Lindsay?"

"Yes, sir?"

"I'm starting a subscription for a hospital here—we need it—take the case of that Northerner the other day. Mr. Barker has opened it for five hundred. I'm putting in a hundred, and we'd better have a notice up. I'll give it to you."

"Yes, sir."

"What do you make of this assault matter?"

"Dunno, sir; something queer about it."

"Did we get the right end of it?"

"That beats me, sir; it has Trupp's touch all through."

"It has, but why should Flint take the attitude he does—which may well be perjury?"

"There's more to that fellow than meets the eye, sir."

"I agree, but—oh!—perhaps—"

"What's in your mind, sir?"

"We'll just wait and see. Meantime keep an eye on Mr. Flint."

"I will, sir. He's gone back to the hotel now."

It took Lemuel some time to get back, so many there were who stopped him on the way because indeed he had made himself a place in this good-natured rabble of nations. Richfield had accepted him as a crook, but a straight crook, so first-class an artist in his own line that the pigeons he plucked enjoyed the process, and came back for more as soon as they could afford it. His fund of general information, his engaging manner, his acquaintance with the poets, all backed by his distinctive attire, were a matter of local satisfaction. Now he had been roughly bereft of his art, and public sympathy was with him.

This touched him, and when Scotch Jenny told him to

keep his room and not pay another cent for the rest of the season, it was almost too much.

But when he reached the room and friendly voices were silent, when he saw the red silk faro deck neatly folded on the bureau, the weight of life became too heavy and he laid for a long time on his bed, face down.



Excitement on the Red Jacket

AT Parsons' store you could get almost anything you wanted from a pair of hip boots at fifty dollars to English wax candles at a dollar apiece; you'd find a box of dried apples set convenient with the lid off; if things were good maybe a box of prunes. Parsons bought gold, and aimed to be postmaster, but couldn't, not being a British subject: according to B.C. laws the office had to be separate, so he built an annex with a door between and rented that to the Government, but the key got lost.

George Burrows was postmaster: there were a lot of pigeonholes with glass in front, so if you could read edge-ways you'd see without asking, or you could put your head in at a ten-inch opening and ask George. He had a long table there with packets of letters from all over the world tied with string. The thing about George was that once he'd read a name he never forgot it; he was so shortsighted that faces didn't mean much to him, so names meant all the more, and if you expected him to look through all those packets, he'd take one up, flip over the ends like they were a pack of cards, shake his head and say nothing doing. He didn't write very well himself, but always remembered anything he'd read, so never got stuck. Sometimes he'd have a lot of money there, so his bunk was at the back of the office, and he slept alongside the safe.

The Sunday after the two notices went up, the store was pretty full with a lot of talk about the new hospital and Lemuel. People liked Lemuel because he'd never pretended to be anything but just what he was. Certainly tough,

they thought, to have one's profession wiped right out, for Doc Flattery had told someone that he'd never again deal himself a full house with that hand.

There'd been common speculation about the unknown criminal, and if a short, stocky man with side whiskers came in the boys would march him up to the description, and if he didn't show clearly where he differed the drinks were on him.

Parsons had put himself down for a couple of hundred. The list steadily lengthened. He was honorary treasurer and certainly worked hard. He'd sell some candles or maybe a keg of black powder, then add ten per cent, and when the customer asked why he'd point to the notice and want to know if the fellow couldn't read. A lot of them couldn't. If the customers still objected, he'd call general attention to this and invite him to trade elsewhere. He kept the gold contributions separate in a canvas poke marked HOSPITAL FUND.

Mary came in with young Harper. Lemuel didn't show up; he was keeping much to himself—didn't like the publicity he was in for—and hardly anyone had seen him since that night except on the way back from Begbie's office.

Dan was down on the Red Jacket: he did that every Sunday morning instead of church, working by himself in a slow, thoughtful way, being the kind that couldn't displace a thing once it got into his head. If he imagined something, he couldn't back up on his tracks and un-imagine it. On the Jacket he had imagined that Johnny and Sing were all wrong, that it wasn't a luxury claim, and a pile of gold laid somewhere there on bed-rock—a lot like him in the Cariboo who didn't know how to quit. Ma realised all this, but since she had pushed him into the Jacket, and loved him with all her heart, there was nothing she could do about it. And of course Mary knew too.

A man came into the store whom Parsons didn't know, but that wasn't surprising because maybe a thousand made

the Cariboo every week, with nearly the same number going out, and only a few stuck it long enough to be remembered. This one had hard eyes and sloping shoulders. He took a quick look round, read the notices, and gave a shrug. Then he smiled. He bought some prunes and was moving off when Parsons said, "Ain't you forgotten something?" He said, "Put me down for ten dollars." "What's the name?" asks Parsons." "Hollis," he said, "Jim Hollis of Sacramento"—which didn't mean anything to anyone.

Then he went through to the post office, gave his name again, asking George for letters. George said there were none. The man wanted him to make sure—he expected something important—and that riled George, who picked up a bundle, flipped the edges like lightning and said, "If you're so darn stuck on getting a letter I'll write you one myself, Mr. Hollis of Sacramento."

Everyone laughed at this; the man gave a snarl. Just then he saw Mary, sent her a queer, quick look, and went out.

"Who's that?" asked Harper.

"I didn't know his name till I heard it just now."

"He seems to know you."

"He does—in a way." She told him that Hollis had stopped at the cabin a few days ago for a drink, and was polite. She had not seen him since.

Harper didn't like the looks of the man and determined to find out about him, and just then Marta came in with another woman.

"'Lo, Mary—how's things, Harry? I suppose you know what happened to poor Mr. Flint?" and without waiting answer, "I want you to be acquainted with my friend, Miss Calderwood of New York. Lena, this is Miss Mary Bowers of Frisco and Mr. Harper of England. You've heard me speak of them."

"Sure I have." She put out her hand to Mary, giving Harper a sort of nod—she resented what he had said about

Marta living with a man, and wanted him to know it—hanging onto Mary's hand with a hard, tight grip. She was tall, flat, the same thickness all the way down, walked with a kind of wavy motion; wore a purple skirt, pink wash blouse, wide-brimmed hat with a pair of green humming-birds on it.

"I suppose you'll be going out pretty soon, Miss Bowers?"

It was so near the time for this that one talked about it more than of anything else except when one couldn't go, like the Bowers, so Mary only smiled and said what a tough trip it was and would be till the new Cariboo Road got through. She took a good look at the Kangaroo, it being the first time she'd seen her close. Her cheeks were thin, they seemed to have tightened her lips endways so they didn't quit close but left a line of teeth like a horse getting set to neigh; she had long arms and legs and long, thin feet that might have been steel wire. It was queer, thought Mary, that men were ready to pay fifty cents to whirl a thing like her round for two or three minutes—nothing like dancing with Marta when you got an armful of something warm and firm with a big, white, heaving breast, bright flaxen hair and blue eyes smiling up at you. But Lena had made two thousand dollars that summer, and was heading for Victoria in a fortnight.

The store was full, with Parsons dashing off receipts. The men stood back that the three woman might read the notice, and Marta put herself in for fifty, while the Kangaroo held off a minute then wrote up a hundred because, she said, the boys had been so darn decent, which pleased everyone and made Mary feel quite different about her. She herself couldn't do anything without Ma, and Harper had no money at all; he got red in the face, but couldn't help himself for soon the Red Jacket would close down for the lay-over, and he'd only earned what he'd given to pay off his debt and his board.

"Letters?" he said, "we forgot them—I'll ask George."

There were two, one for Ma Bowers, the other for him with English stamps; at sight of the writing he gave an odd exclamation, put it in his pocket unopened.

"Ma'll be glad to have it," Mary glanced at the other, "it's from Molly Clancy—they bought our place. Didn't you get one?"

Harper nodded, then Marta said, "Look here, Harry, by rights someone ought to visit Mr. Flint, it's only Christian; he's in pretty bad shape. I'd go myself but Jenny won't let a girl upstairs—says it isn't that kind of a hotel."

"He doesn't like me very much."

"Shucks! What's the difference? That pilgrim's up against it."

"I'll go. Don't wait, Mary, I'll catch up."

Lemuel's room was in front on the top storey overlooking the main street; in the passage was a tin tray with a pot of cold coffee and some condensed milk he hadn't touched. The door was locked. When Harper knocked he got no answer for a moment, then a hoarse voice:—

"That you again, Doc?"

"No, it's me," said Harper, "I'm Harry Harper. How're you feeling—can I come in?"

A slow step came across, the door opened. The bed was tossed, but Lemuel had not slept in it; his clothing was crumpled; the fingers of the bandaged hand stuck out white with no blood in them. It was not this hand that held one's gaze, but Lemuel's face, the face of an old man, infinitely sad and experienced. How changed, thought Harper, from the man of a week ago.

"Just came in to see if I could do anything," said he awkwardly.

"I'm obliged, but—" Lemuel, instantly aware that he had been sent, shook his head, "I guess not. The doc has fixed me up."

"Will that hand take long to heal?"

"It won't be what you'd call a hand when it has healed."

"Hard luck! Had any breakfast?"

"I ain't eating breakfast. Much talk around town?"

"The boys are all sorry, Flint—they've nothing against you. I suppose you'll be going out soon?"

"I don't rightly know—might winter in here— I'll think things over. This place is closing in three weeks, but there'll be lots of empty shacks. Anything doing on the Jacket?"

"As much as ever there was—or will be. Anything I can do—anyone you'd like to see?"

Lemuel winced; from the fire in his palm a molten thread ran up to his shoulder, but that was secondary. The window stood open; below surged the lusty tide of full-blooded Richfield, its talk and tumult reached him clearly, and it was this, from which he now felt forever divorced, that made the moment so hard to bear.

"If Dan dropped in he'd be welcome."

"I'll tell him; just now he's down on the Jacket—as usual. Hope you'll soon be easier."

It was like talking with a man part of whom was dead while the rest should not be alive, and he was glad to get away.

"He'll be going out pretty soon," said Marta, "but, Gosh! it's tough."

"He may winter inside—he doesn't know."

"Alone!"

"I suppose so, he's counting on some empty shack."

"There'll be ours," Lena gave a whinny, "he could have that, Marta."

"Sure he could; it's all fixed up with everything he'll need; we're only taking our clothes, and," she added gently, "he knows that shack pretty well."

"You two are kind," said Mary impulsively.

"Shucks! I'd sooner have it lived in than not." Marta hated thanks of any kind. "Just think of that poor pilgrim and the parade he put up on the *Brother Jonathan*. Told

you about that, didn't I Lena? Well, it's time to heat up the hash."

Lena gave her horsey smile; they billowed off, their bright plumage and red skirts, threading a multitude of black coats.

"She's splendid," said Mary penitently, "they're both splendid. I feel mean; it's us, my family, that ought to be helping not them. They don't owe him anything."

"If he does stay in, and you too, you can do a lot."

"Harry, I don't understand you at all."

"What have I said now?"

"Never mind. What does Mr. Flint look like?"

"There's something queer in his face, I think it's shame, just shame. He's only got what he deserved; cheated once too often, that's all."

"I'd sooner you didn't talk like that."

"It's the case, isn't it?"

"Even if it is, you needn't get up on the judgment seat. He wouldn't."

Harper didn't like this. "He seems to have found a good friend in you."

"I hope so. He's kind, generous; I believe the only reason he put money into the Red Jacket was to help Dan, and—well—Harry, are you going out this winter? You haven't said anything about it."

"There's no alternative, is there?"

"We'll all miss you like anything."

"The other way too. I'll get a job in Victoria and come back next year at the head of the procession. Would you sooner I stayed in?"

"If you put it like that, I don't know," she said honestly. "It depends how you feel. I was talking about it to Ma and she says you can stay with—"

"The Bowers have done enough for me already."

What she wanted to tell him was that though she cared, she didn't yet know how much. But he didn't perceive

this, and if at that moment he had put his arms round her the rest would have been easier. Now it seemed that he was thinking of himself. And this hurt.

"I suppose you've got to help your own people?"

"Help them!"

"You told Ma you'd left England because there wasn't room for you at home."

"Did I say that?"

"Yes, but if they don't need help, so much the better."

"I'd forgotten all about it," he laughed.

"You're a queer person. Let's sit here a while."

They were halfway over the Little Canyon, with a good view. He took out the letter, looked at it a moment, slit the envelope. Two sheets of heavy white paper with something in blue stamped in the top left-hand corner. With these a slip, smaller, narrower. He glanced at this first, gave a whistle, put it in his pocket. As he read she could not but notice that the writing was large and spidery.

Twice he went through it, then, with an odd look:—

"Forwarded from New York—it's an invitation to come home. They've sent me money—quite a lot."

"Then there is room now?"

"There always was, but I felt restless and started off. Now they ask me to come back."

"I—I see," then, because something was boiling up inside her, "of course the winter's going to be hard, and there's nothing now to keep you—really. Come on, I've a letter for Ma; she'll be wondering where I am."

Ma was writing to Molly Clancy about the trip north, the cost of living in Richfield, the Red Jacket. A lot of things she felt like putting in, but pride forbade, and she sat wrinkling her short, straight nose.

"We're in a fine home of our own, but I've been too busy to get a photo taken. Dan keeps on working, but he'll have to quit soon for the lay-over because there's

not more than four months open season then everything freezes tight. Dan's claim is in good location for gold so I guess it won't be long now, and we'll stick right to it for I feel kind of responsible for our being here as you'll understand. Right now men are starting for Yale. Mr. Knott, the undertaker who has been so kind to us, is not going out. This place is peaceful after Stanleytown with no shooting, but last week a gambler called Flint got a knife through his hand for being too slick, and I'm sorry for he was real good to us on the boat. There's times when I get scared about the winter, but none of the family know that. Dan looks fine, so does Mary. She's soft on a young Englishman who's broke, but he's going out so I don't worry. There's a Judge in here and right from the start—"

She had got this far when she heard the young people outside.

"Where's Dan, Mary?"

"I think he's with Johnny and Sing on the Jacket."

"Letter for you, Ma, it's Mrs. Clancy."

"That's funny; I was in the middle of one to her. Harry, you can take it out."

"I will, Mrs. Bowers, if I go out."

Ma looked at them sharply. "What's the matter with you two anyway?"

"Nothing," Mary's tone was a little thin, a little hard, "everything's just as I like it."

"For the land's sake! Say, daughter, I—what's happened now?"

A procession of three was making up hill, Dan leading, waving like a windmill; after him stalked Johnny, long rusty coat flapping against bony knees, then Sing who had discarded his greasy kitchen garb. He was attired in splendour, the pigtail was coiled under a wide-brimmed, straw-plaited hat shaped like a flattened cone, he flaunted a loose

tunic of blue silk, its sleeves long, flowing, its hem embroidered with seed pearls; his trousers were a yellow amplitude, his slippers straw-soled, heelless.

"For the land's sake, Dan Bowers, what's got into your folks anyway?"

"Look, mother, look!" In his sweaty palm lay two small nuggets the size of half an acorn. "By God! she's made good after all—the Red Jacket's all right."

Ma examined them as she might another woman's first-born. "Is that all?"

"All!" he looked shocked, "what do you expect? I wasn't even looking for these; we were sitting round, talking, and I turned over a shovelful and there it was right under my nose."

Then a queer thing happened: Ma felt a sort of wave; this didn't mean anything at all. She admitted it should mean a lot, and didn't understand herself, but somehow something told her that such things didn't happen to them; they might to others, like Billy Barker, but not to the Bowers. Her sensation was one of regret that she couldn't light up, get excited. There stood Dan with gold in his hand, real gold from the claim she had urged him to gamble on, and it left her cold with a horrid conviction that these two nuggets were the beginning and end of it: there he stood like a big child with something to be admired, and she just couldn't. Johnny was watching her with an expression that baffled her, as for Mr. Sing he only sent her the bland friendly smile that meant nothing, and caressed the sparse plantation of short, black hairs on his broad, fat chin. What Sing felt only Sing knew.

"Dan!" she murmured, "that's splendid, just splendid. You kind of took the wind out of me. Gosh! but I'm glad."

It sounded all right, he gave a laugh; Ma wasn't like other folks, you couldn't tell what she'd say or do, but you'd bank on her every time.

"This laid right on the surface, so now we've got to dig

like hell. Course I knew the stuff was there in spite of what Johnny claimed," he went on largely, "but didn't reckon to strike it quite so soon. We'll have a good-sized poke when the snow flies."

"Then go out! Oh, Dan, that means a lot."

"No, I guess not; you can't wash gravel in winter but you can sink a shaft if you know how—and there's lots else to do."

"F'rinstance you can sell out to-morrow," put in Johnny drily, noting sudden consternation in Ma's face.

"Sell out!" she caught that up, "can he sell—who to—how much—why of course he'd sell."

"Come on, Dan, tell her."

"Well," Dan closed his fist over the nuggets, squeezed and squeezed, "it's this way—I'd just found the stuff, and we were hunting for more, when a fellow came along, man called Snyder, and he wanted to buy me out for five thousand, but naturally nothing doing."

"Nothing doing!" said she in a small voice, "you told him that!"

"Why certainly. You be sensible, mother, and think a minute; five thousand for what'll be worth fifty next year. It's a joke. Claims are selling for that right now on Lower Williams and not a stroke of work done on them. You wait till we get that new shaft down."

She didn't dare look at him, she knew too well what she'd see—a big, good-natured face slight with new hope and courage, eyes glowing with the blinding, golden vision: here was security within reach, and he wouldn't touch it, nothing could alter that. Once his mind was made up it had the terrible fixity of the simpleminded; it didn't matter that she was aching, praying to get back to Telegraph Hill even if they had to live on wild carrots—it just didn't matter.

"You selling, Johnny?"

"No, ma'am, matter of fact I ain't; there's only one thing I sell—it's made of wood. I feel the way I told you

first; she's a luxury claim, the only luxury I got. Nowheres to go on Sunday if I sell, so what's the point?"

"You, Mr. Sing?"

"Velly small pieces gold but Led Jacket velly nice claim. Sing no sell!"

"So there you are, mother; we're all staying with it. Gol darn it, why shouldn't we?"

Ma licked her lips in doubt: to her the nuggets might have been brass; she had no confidence in Dan's judgment; as to Johnny, old men had queer fancies, his views didn't mean anything really. Sing, however, was somehow different. The Chinese were gamblers and shrewd ones, and now though the black almond eyes told her nothing save that he was not selling either, she tried to draw comfort from that.

"Let's see them, Dan."

"They're yours—from the partners," he grinned, "settled that on the way up; next summer you can have a rope of 'em like Scotch Jenny."

This jolted her; she felt vexed with herself, full of remorse for wanting to quit when she'd never had so little reason for quitting; she was the only quitter in the family; Sophy Cameron hadn't quit though she knew what it would cost. There was Mary looking like a millionairess already, shining eyes telling young Harper that their future was made; Dan, fresh from his only strike, wondering what had happened to her; while she, who classed herself the strong one of the family, caved in because winter was coming on. Then with sudden warmth in her voice, cupping the nuggets in her palm, she said:—

"That's downright kind of you all; I appreciate it more'n anything, and I'll keep them till kingdom come. We can't celebrate, there ain't a drop of liquor in the house, but I'd be pleased if you'd stay for a bite."

Johnny said no, breakfast and supper did him for Sunday; Sing shook his head, and the two went off like an old crow beside a fat parrot while Ma set about trying to make

up for being unreasonable though the five thousand kept dancing before her eyes.

"Dan, you're kind of disappointed the way I took it, sakes alive! it don't seem real yet. Billy Barker's strike was real enough with all the excitement, and him carting a hundredweight of gold that very night, but this is somehow different. Perhaps it ain't in my line."

"Well," he said, "I can understand that too, but when I got those two nuggets there was quite an excitement on Upper Williams; you see they'd chalked off the Jacket for a dead one, and, Ma, if," here he got red and came round and gave her a squeeze that drove the breath out of her, "if it hadn't been for you we wouldn't be fixed the way we are now. Pretty often I felt like quitting, though you never weakened and drove me right on, so it's your judgment that's done it, and the credit belongs to you."

That got Ma all mixed up, she wanted to cry and laugh at the same time. Supposing the Jacket didn't yield another cent—and she couldn't imagine it would—that credit was hers also, but there were more things in life than any old gravel heap, rich or barren. The way Dan was acting made her feel less lonely than of late, and she looked at Mary and Harper in a manner they couldn't mistake; things just had to come right. She was glad Harry would see the winter through, and after what had happened she wouldn't have stood for anything else.

"That's all gasworks, Dan, and you know it. I'd just started a letter to Molly Clancy, now here's one from her; I couldn't rightly decide what to tell her without making her think that somehow—well—you know. Now they'll sit up straight when they get it."

10

Judge Begbie Amongst His Friends

SHORTENING days marched swiftly on; Indian summer beguiled with false warmth; nightly frosts were crisp but vanished with a rising sun; white birch, alder, poplar and dogwood brandished stripped arms against grey skies. Far overhead were traced wavering pencil lines as the wild geese, stoutest Argonauts of all, deserted sub-Arctic Barrens for the swamps of South America; at night their fluted signals penetrated cabins where other Argonauts listened in envy of such matchless independence. The rounded hills grew bare, exposing their ancient ribs till only spruce and cedar maintained a resolute greenery; rivers and creeks shrank to narrowing channels; the grizzly betook himself to a cave, the mule deer donned a heavier coat.

In the Cariboo, with the enemy at the gates, life quickened to a final burst. Barnard's Express and the Government escort travelled hard and fast, burdened with booty from the north; Scotch Jenny was nailing up windows in the Hotel de France—next year she'd move over to Barkerville; Oliver re-chinked his stable—he had cut enough meadow hay to see Barnee through the winter; Jack Lennard was remaining inside to burn charcoal; Billy Barker had started south with ten thousand dollars for pocket money for seven months; the seven claims were yielding a hundred-weight of gold a day from a pay streak now five feet thick; Dexter and others stayed in to hoist a dump to be washed next summer. They were all on velvet.

Hourly the population shrank. Marta and Lena had

gone with the other Hurdies, and Lemuel occupied their cabin. When he had wanted to pay for it Marta had looked at him very earnestly—then gave a forced laugh and said, "Mr. Flint, you're more than welcome," and went off, feeling choky.

Hammers kept going in Barkerville till the last moment. The Judge was finishing his report on the season; nothing more of Michael Trupp since the Forks murders. Trupp, as usual, had got clean away. Now, apparently, he had quit the district; if not, the trail was black with men, not a few carrying gold, and Michael might be expected to make a final clean-up before the snow flew. If he'd got as far as Lytton he'd be safe. The Government gold escort, wrote Begbie in his firm, clear hand, was not paying expenses; a shilling an ounce Williams to Yale, with the stuff uninsured, was too much: the BX, who did insure, and carried for less, got nearly all the business. Then the matter of camels: the smell of Frank Laumeister's cavalcade had made constant trouble. As Frank argued, this was a free country, but camels were somehow out of place.

It was a long report, there being more to say about the Cariboo than Begbie had anticipated; his fingers grew stiff, so laying aside the pen he picked up a small volume of Shakespeare, read for a while, then concluded he needed exercise. The evening was dark with chill in the wind and a promise of snow. He slipped the book in his pocket, and started out. Two visits he wanted to pay.

Johnny was at home; he stretched in a rocking chair, bare feet towards the fire, a wet sock of grey wool dangling from either big toe.

"Why, Judge," he croaked, "come right in. Didn't reckon to see you so late—what's up?"

"Nothing, Johnny, I'm possibly leaving to-morrow; this is just to wish you a comfortable winter."

"Glad you dropped along, I was aiming to see you anyway," he stepped to a corner, opened his coffin, extracted

five ten-dollar notes, "them's yours and thanks all the same."

"That's not my money."

"Sure it is; remember giving me fifty to box up Sophy Cameron?"

"I do, but why return it?"

"Don't know what's happened?"

"I know she died, and assume Mr. Sheepshanks buried her."

"You went out to Clinton about that time, didn't you?"

"I did."

"Well, she died all right, and Jack came in next morning about a casket, but darned if I could do anything for him. First time I ever got stalled. I had the measurement—she was just over five feet—and showed Jack something nice, then I'm busted if he didn't want it of galvanized iron."

"Iron!"

"Yes, sir, iron! He was dead set on it. I argyfied all I was worth—there's nothing wrong with pine, though I'll allow cedar's more tony—but that comes higher and don't make any difference to the departed—and I asks him when's the funeral, but, Judge, there weren't going to be no funeral, and he wanted her soldered up good and tight. She's going out."

"What do you mean by that?"

"Sure she is; he'd promised she'd be buried beside her folks in Ontario if he struck it. Seems he's sort of down-cast about the rough time she had with him, and if he don't strike it he'll pull her out by his lonesome soon as there's enough snow for a toboggan. Now what do you make of that?"

"A very remarkable devotion."

Mr. Knott spat in the fire, began to pull on his socks:—
"Why, certainly; but towing a female corpse, even her size, four hundred miles to Yale simply ain't human. Well, anyway, Jack Lennard cased her up. Here's your fifty."

"Thanks; I'll see Cameron to-morrow. How are you feeling?"

"No complaints, Judge; I'll get a lot of sleep this winter same as a groundhog. Course I ain't any spryer as time goes on. There'll be a lot doing in my line next year when the rush comes. Ever notice it's the young goes first—I average 'em so far round twenty-eight—they get careless about grub, don't dry their socks, then the newmonier catches 'em."

"I have noticed that. Johnny, there may be ten thousand men in this district next year."

"Judas priest!"

"Also I learned that some Victoria undertakers will be heading this way, so you're in for competition."

"Have to think out something to hold my trade, eh? You remember that inscription for John Donald's headstone?"

"I do."

"Well, supposing I was to pass in my checks, would you work out one for me? I've been rooting round for some time and struck nothing yet."

"I don't imagine that'll be called for," smiled Begbie, "so long as you dry your socks."

"Supposing I just petered right out."

"I'd do anything I could, Johnny."

"Think of it right now," persisted the old man, "and I ain't forgetting what I said about them prevaricating cemeteries either."

"I didn't come here to suggest epitaphs, but I've a Shakespeare in my pocket."

"Feller that wrote pomes?"

"Yes, just a minute." Begbie pulled out the book, started turning leaves under the unwinking stare of chinablue eyes; soon he nodded, looked up.

"Hit something good?"

"I think it suits the case. You see by the time Shake-

speare died he was a very famous person and wanted to lie in peace after he passed on, so he wrote this for his own gravestone. He was buried in the church at Stratford-on-Avon, and it's on the slab—you can read it to-day after two hundred and forty years:—

‘Good friend, for Jesus’ sake forbear
To dig the dust enclosed here;
Blest be the man that spares these stones
And cursed be he that moves my bones.’ ”

Mr. Knott slapped his thigh; here was the genuine imported article, and far better than anything he could have conceived; no prevaricating about it either; he would puzzle no longer over what a deceased gent might say about himself. There was little prospect of his own bones being disturbed, he admitted that, but the opening geniality of the verse, the crafty appeal ‘*for Jesus’ sake*,’ the abrupt hardening to a final threat—all went straight home.

“By Heck!” he reached for his notebook, “read that again.”

“I’ll make a copy and leave it for you—just in chance. Now tell me something—was there a strike recently on the Red Jacket? I’ve heard talk of it, mostly conflicting.”

Johnny looked grave. “I’m glad you mentioned that. Seeing the Bowers before you go out?”

“I may drop in there to-night?”

“Well, sir, it’s mighty fortunate you spoke of it; there weren’t no strike at all, and that’s straight. Dan picked up a couple of no account nuggets, and you’d think he’d lit on the motherlode. Got an offer, but won’t sell, darn him.”

“Could you have sold?”

“Sure—same with Sing, but we’re holding on. The Jacket kind of amuses us. Dan can’t afford that sort of diversion. He’s old enough to know it.”

“I agree with you. Nothing found since?”

"No, and there ain't going to be either, and Dan don't count as much as his wife. Judge, there's one fine woman."

"Undoubtedly. How does she feel about it?"

"She was sort of cautious a moment, then acted as though she was tickled to death, but, pshaw! she was only bluffing—wouldn't let Dan down. I seen it right away, so did Sing, so if I was you I wouldn't say too much about the Jacket."

"Thanks for the hint, Johnny. Well, good-bye till early next June. Take care of yourself, continue to dry your socks. Anything I can do for you in Victoria?"

"You might tell them undertakers there's no profit in the business in here."

"Yes, I'll take a chance on that."

"We'll certainly be glad to see you back; so'll a heap of other folks. If I don't wake up some morning, I'd like my stuff to go to Mrs. Bowers with the only real nugget ever came out of the Jacket. It's right there in the casket. So long, Judge; good trip."

Begbie paused several times on his way. Friend and guide to thousands of men, he felt oddly responsible in this case; he'd seen so much unmerited suffering, so many a blasted hope, that he always tried to help by however small a fraction: and there was a wild, strong heart beating in this wilderness.

"I'm a little late," he said at the door.

They were all glad to see him: the cabin the most attractive in camp with its floor newly boarded over; Johnny had done that when he learned they were wintering inside, and wouldn't take any money for it. Mary was sewing, Ma at a letter, Dan and young Harper smoking. Curtains drawn at the small windows, kettle humming, the lamp glass clear and bright. Begbie accepted Harper's chair, lighted his pipe and smiled at them all. He was amongst friends here.

"It's a farewell visit. I go out to-morrow."

Ma sent him a glance, she didn't speak, and looked sober.

"Well, Judge," said Dan, "a couple of weeks ago I'd have felt kind of envious, but not now. Heard about the Red Jacket?"

"Something."

"That claim's making good; we found where the stuff is, we're going right down after it: quite a different story now."

He went on while the others held silent; Mary looked as though she'd heard it too often, Harper seemed only slightly interested, while Ma sat pen in hand, head on one side and appeared to be listening to someone not visible: Begbie could very nearly read her thoughts.

"I hope all will go well; Upper Williams has a good record. Send me a line later on—Victoria will catch me. But there's a lot of work ahead of you, while a good deal of the time you won't be able to work at all."

"That's so, sir, but we'll be getting out timber."

"I understand. Mrs. Bowers, I take it you're safely provisioned for the winter? It's part of my duty to inquire into that sort of thing."

"It's all taken care of, Judge," said she quietly, "and Mr. Harper's boarding with us. That's fixed."

"I'm glad to hear it. Barely a hundred men and no women except you two will be here till next May anyway."

"I won't miss the others, but it'll be pretty slow for daughter."

"Don't you worry about me, Ma."

Begbie's eyes twinkled; easy to see what had reconciled her.

"Well, you've a good neighbour in Johnny, but he'll sleep twenty hours out of the twenty-four. What about you, Harper?"

"Working with Dan, sir; I'm all right."

"He could have gone right back to the old country—and didn't," said Ma.

"In love with the Cariboo, eh?" chuckled Begbie.

"That's right, sir," Harper flushed a little, "I had the chance, but Dan's giving me a small share for my work."

The Judge nodded: what if he voiced his own thoughts at this moment warning Dan that the scales were weighted against him, and wiser men than himself rated the Red Jacket a worthless dump that might first break his back, then his heart. He imagined Ma's face should he say this, how she would drop with a clatter the valiant armour she wore, and tell Dan that's what she always felt in spite of what she said, that the whole business had been one great mistake, and they must get out, now, quickly, while the going was open: how Dan would take it, protest, argue, then surrender—for without her backing he couldn't see it through—and leave the Cariboo a beaten man, and this cabin would stand empty with a snow-drifted floor, dry nasturtiums on the window sill till the next bemused Argonaut, drunk with the same ferment, seized it for his own—Begbie could see all this.

But when he met Ma's eyes he knew it to be impossible; she was anointed—ready for sacrifice.

"I've put some books together for you," he said, "Sergeant Lindsay will bring them over. With luck you should get a mail once a fortnight, but no supplies. I'll send you a Victoria paper. If I were you, Mrs. Bowers, I'd form some kind of a reading club, it would be popular and shorten the long evenings."

"I'll do that," nodded Ma gratefully. "We'll welcome the papers. A lot of folks from Ohio must have gone to the war, and we don't know a thing about them. Last I heard was from those two on the way in with the two-man barrow. Seems a long time ago now."

"It does, but since then I learn that the south is doing well, with Johnson giving McLellan a busy time of it, though nothing definite yet. I think we're in for a long war."

"Those boys must be having tough going," said Ma

softly. "Is it over the slaves? I've got nothing against the South."

"Lincoln will not have the South secede, but the slave question's at the bottom. Harper, I've a disappointment for you."

"What's that, sir?"

"Michael Trupp has most likely cleared out, for the winter anyway, but the reward still stands."

They all laughed at this except Ma, who looked a little odd, and Begbie went on talking in his own companionable fashion of things that he knew would interest these good folk so soon to be marooned, such as the new hospital which would be going next year with a certificated nurse in uniform from Victoria. When he finished he seemed to have told them quite a lot but, later, it wasn't much more than they knew already. When Lemuel's name came up he said there would be just the right man for the reading club, with him so fond of poetry, and Ma, who was filling the teapot, turned and looked him in the face, and he sent back as once before exactly the same signal she had got from Molly Clancy on the wharf at Stanleytown. She didn't have to tell this man anything, he seemed to know from the very start, he was the only living soul that did know, and now that he was leaving them she wished she had kept nothing from him, that she had told him about Steve and the two hundred, asked if it was wise to winter in the Cariboo, and a lot of other things. There she was, voiceless from pride, wanting to hear just what he would have liked to tell her, while he who could have saved her so much secret uncertainty was silenced by the fact that it was her business, not his. Between them lifted a sort of barrier to free speech. From each side it looked different but was equally effective.

"I'd be obliged," she handed him a cup, "if you'd take out a letter; it's to friends in California who'll be mighty

pleased to hear about the Red Jacket. I told 'em I wouldn't write till there was something worth writing, eh, Dan?"

"That's it, mother."

"Sugar, Judge?"

"No, thanks." The smile he gave did a lot to hearten her; she seemed to know him even better than she did Dan.

"Anything I can do for you in Victoria?"

"Not a thing, thanks just the same. We'll certainly be pleased to have you back."

"Or you, Harper? By the way what's your part of Kent?"

"Charing, sir, on the Dover Road, about fifty miles from London."

Begbie looked at him sharply. "Can it be that—" he broke off, "well, never mind. Don't forget those readings, Mrs. Bowers; I'll do my best to keep in some kind of touch. Good luck, Dan, to you all. Harper, it's rather a dark night—would you care to come part of the way?"

When they had gone a short distance he stopped, put his hand on the young man's shoulder:—

"I think you must know a certain large house on the hill above Charing; Elizabethan, I think, of old red brick with many chimneys and mullioned windows. There's a deer park."

"Good Lord, sir, you—"

"I know nothing, but rightly or wrongly assume a good deal."

"What an extraordinary thing!"

"The world's a small place after all; it came when you said where your home was. I saw the house I described, in fact I dined there a few years ago, but the young people were away so I didn't see them."

"It's queer that we meet like this, sir."

"Oh, I don't know. Odd encounters seem quite natural in this country. How are your people, Harper?"

"All right, sir. I heard from them this week."

"You prefer the Cariboo to the County of Kent?"

"Well, Judge, I fancy you've seen enough to form your own conclusions."

Begbie laughed. "Perhaps I have. You're the eldest son, aren't you?"

"Yes, sir."

"Is it fair to ask what brought you all this distance?"

"Bit of a tiff at home. Then I pulled out and made for New York. From there I went round the Horn, and at Frisco I heard of the Cariboo."

"A case of the wandering foot finally halting on the Red Jacket, eh? Well, Harper, I hope you're not expecting much from that claim."

"Well, sir, I don't care much either way."

"You're more fortunate than most others. Will you go home if it doesn't make good?"

"Not yet, sir: I haven't stretched my legs enough, and—er—of course there's Mary."

"So I have observed," smiled Begbie, "what else?"

"Honestly, I don't know; I'm footloose, that's all. Sometimes I think I'd like to go home and shoot tame pheasants we've raised from chicks, and again I wouldn't. That sort of thing looks pointless from this distance."

"As against a possible grizzly? In other words, Harper, you're in a state of change—is that it?"

"I suppose so."

"Well, the Cariboo has a lot of others much like yourself; I see them everywhere, easily recognisable. Many of 'em are escapists, they don't come here because they like this country, but to get away from something they fancy still less. Others are simply gold mad, and ninety-eight per cent of them headed for disillusionment. Others like you simply footloose. Only time will tell which of them are likely to contribute anything to the development of this country, and one learns not to judge by appearance. What we want in this Colony is the man who will stay put

and work, no matter what happens to him. Now where do you come in?"

"I don't know, sir."

"Y'see I'm trying to look ahead; I have dreams of this western land—of what it may be—some day. Now we're administered by the British Government, and signify very little in Whitehall. I realised that when I was last over there. But it won't always be like that, while if England—or Canada—don't wake up British Columbia will certainly join the United States. If the question were put to popular vote today, I believe it would carry. A lot of people here think that way. Well, can you see your own future in this land?"

"I doubt that, sir."

"So do I. To my mind—if I may say so—it's the Scots, not the English, who make the best pioneers; they don't yield to nostalgia for what they have left behind, at least not to the extent of making them less practical and useful out here. What's more," he added whimsically, "they don't yearn for the fleshpots of home—perhaps because there are so few in Scotland. So you've decided to winter inside?"

"I might as well be here as anywhere, sir."

"Harper, since I have the privilege of knowing your father, may I put a personal question?"

"Of course."

"Then how much does Mary enter into this?"

"Quite a lot, sir."

"I assume you realise that she knows nothing of your side of life?"

"We haven't got far enough to talk about that."

"Glad to hear it. She is, I think, capable of strong emotions. You have a background—she has none. You have much to occupy your mind—she has, I take it, mainly you. If you were going to spend your life in this country she would be just the wife for you, but I doubt if her type

would stand transplanting to English soil. In view of the fact that you are about to pass the winter together, you might consider this."

"You—you think I'd better not stay in?"

Begbie laughed. "My dear fellow, your affairs are your own—always, and if you stay here till the break-up you'll see the colour of a life unlike anything you've imagined. What do you propose to do with yourself mostly?"

"Shoot for one thing; I'd like to bag a grizzly."

Begbie clapped his shoulder. "How British! you should get moose, and mule deer with some cariboo, but grizzlies are hard to find till springtime. You'll hear a lot from Dan about the golden floor he's going to uncover on the Red Jacket, but I think his partners are right—that claim is worthless. You'll find Mr. Knott a fund of interest when he's awake, which won't be for long at a time, and in my opinion that unfortunate gambler has his good points. So good luck, Harper. I'll be glad to hear how things go. I can't promise to answer promptly because my time will be spent largely on the Bench. Good-bye."

II

A Chance Encounter

LEMUEL, who had moved into Marta's shack, sat alone, trying to deal with his left hand, but it was like watching another person at it, the hand seemed to belong to another person. It should have been fed like a fine automatic machine, but the right fingers wouldn't properly release the cards, either pinching tight or letting them go all in a slither.

Presently he gave up, and examined the wound against the lamp; the scar was more than an inch long; it had closed, but the edges were like a small, pursed mouth. It made a sort of dead end, with not much life beyond it; the hand had developed a flat curve, and now resembled a claw. With an effort he could nearly close it, but that made the scar burn. Doc Flattery had told him it would always be thus, but soon, if he stuck to practicing, he'd be able to shave and write with the left.

He was feeling lonely and strange. Till the other day life had been a simple proposition; he knew what he wanted, knew how to get it, and found pleasure in his art. Now he still craved the same thing, but couldn't have it, and there was no art left in anything. And his former playground was closed.

Out in Yale and Victoria there would be this winter perhaps ten thousand men with whom he could never gamble, in Richfield there'd be less than a hundred. So—and because Mary was here—he was staying inside, though what would come of it he could not tell. But of one thing he was definitely aware: a change in him deeper than physical had taken place, and now for the first time he felt

capable of crime. It was as though the knife, puncturing a little sac of poison, had dispersed the virus through his blood. It was startling to feel thus, and he spent hours in search of the sort of crime best suited to a left-handed man by which he might wreak vengeance on James Hollis of Sacramento.

He was brooding over this when he heard a knock: he took it to be a final visit from Doc Flattery who had been kind to him and refused payment, so he said, "Come in," and saw a man outlined against the darkness. He waited a moment looking behind him as though to make sure he wasn't being followed, then round the cabin, lastly at Lemuel.

It was James Hollis.

Then he came in, shut the door, and without a word took a chair. Lemuel's lips went dry as he observed that Hollis' pocket had a bulge the size of a Colt, but his pulse somehow remained steady. Hollis put a hand in the pocket, drew it away empty, gave a stare, and again scrutinised the cabin which was neater than when Marta and Lena lived there. Now everything was just so that Lemuel could lay a hand on it when he wanted to. The faro deck upside down on the bureau gave a touch of colour, the lamp chimney bright, the round steel stove had been black-leaded. There were two short benches, and two chairs that Johnny had shaped out of barrels, stuffed with meadow hay, and upholstered with flour sacking. You could see the HBC in blue stamped letters. Johnny said that meant 'here before Christ.'

"You seem pretty well fixed, Flint; how's the hand?"

This, curiously, was just what Lemuel needed: it set up in him exactly the condition he desired, and he discerned it as kindred with certain rare moments in past life when he knew, for some reason or other, that he was about to pull off something big with no trouble at all; so he did not flush, or show resentment, or hostility, but felt quite cool

and much more like his old self. There was a Colt under a silk nightshirt in the top drawer of the bureau, but he'd be dead before he could reach it, so he laid that aside for the present, and set his nimble brain at work.

"It's just what you see, Hollis."

"You asked for it, didn't you?"

Lemuel shrugged. "We'll leave that side of it out. What do you want now!"

"Pulled yourself together, eh? Well, I'm glad of it—maybe I used that knife too fast—" then, his manner changing—"that description in the post office—I'm obliged, but it beats me. What's behind it?"

"Useful?"

"Certainly."

"Then I reckon we're both satisfied."

Now a pause while the blue-grey eyes rested on him for a moment with intense abstraction. The game had opened and Lemuel felt himself being weighed in the killer's scales, but since life held so little its possible brevity seemed almost unimportant. Hollis could not rob him of anything he valued very much, and there rose in him a tide of what was almost contentment with things as they stood. But behind all this was the promise he had given that Mary would never know what he knew, so the rest of life was best used in killing this killer so soon as opportunity offered.

"I asked what you wanted this time."

"Flint, you're a better man now than you were a month ago, also there's times when business needs overhauling. Mine does. That's why I'm here. What's more I'll say it's easier to get round since that notice went up, though why—?"

"It's your ante, Hollis."

"Is that three thousand reward any use to you?"

Lemuel admitted that it would be of considerable use.

Then the man did a queer thing: he stepped towards the door feeling in his pocket for something, and Lemuel,

thinking it was the gun, reached for the bureau, but it wasn't, for Hollis pulled something out, put his hands to his head, and turned, and, by God! he was wearing a black mask. Then he sat down, and said:—

"How much do you want that three thousand? I'm Jim Hollis alias Michael Trupp. Now you know where you are. You needn't tell me any anything—I've got it all."

Alias Steve Bowers! It was on the tip of Lemuel's tongue, checked just in time. This gave him the needed breathing space, and with no change of expression he contemplated the man sitting there with a fortune on his head, dead or alive, and the lights of Richfield burning just outside. But that was nothing more than Trupp knew himself.

"Forgetting the reward, eh?"

"Sure." Lemuel wondered why he didn't take off the mask which had a hole for the mouth but not the nose; the thing was a bag that dropped over the head like a black pyramid from the shoulders up. "What's the big idea?"

The pyramid gave a nod. "That's better. I think you're wise." Then he went on in a dry voice that he had two partners he didn't quite trust, the three thousand making them restless, so he had to circulate himself more than he fancied, and wanted someone right in Richfield he could depend on, and, all things considered, Lemuel would fill the bill nicely. He needed a straight crook with good brains, might be called on any day though perhaps not till next spring, and there was good money in it.

"Where do I come in?"

The minute Lemuel said this he realised he'd taken a step he'd never retrace: it as like being on top of a hill watching a train steam out on a faulty bridge; you knew the bridge wouldn't carry her, she was bound to go through, but you couldn't stop her, you just sat there watching the catastrophe. Now he could see himself taking the next step and the next till he was up to the neck, and had said good-bye

to the old life which, however uncertain, had a charm of its own and was pretty straightforward.

"The proposition," said Trupp, and you could see the edge of the mask flutter as he spoke, "is the Cunningham—ought to interest you."

"It does interest me, go on."

"Those boys are rushed, they're not taking the stuff home at night, they lock the sluicibox with one of them on guard, they take turns at that—won't clean up before the end of the week. Any suggestions?"

"That's not telling me where I come in," croaked Lemuel.

"Quarter interest, you don't have to do a thing—I'll do it—you just stand by, and—"

He got no further, they heard steps nearing the door: Lemuel's blood turned to ice; Trupp whipped off the mask, stuffing it in his pocket while his other hand leaped to his gun; he held it hidden, lips curving to a snarl, his eyes those of a killer.

"Flint," he breathed, "if you—"

Then a deep voice outside said, "May I come in?" The door swung wide and there stood the Judge!

The world seemed to stop: Trupp had turned to stone, but Lemuel, living faster than ever before, brain working at top speed, made a salute and the Judge nodded in his friendly fashion. It all went smooth as oil. The Judge let his eyes rest for a moment on Trupp—you could see it was a new face for him—and Lemuel said, "Meet Mr. Hollis, sir, Jim Hollis of Sacramento," at which the Judge gave another nod, refused to take a chair and planted himself on the bench before the fire as though he were settling down for quite a visit.

"I was passing, Mr. Flint, and dropped in to see how you were getting on; I'll be going out very soon. Are you and Mr. Hollis old acquaintances?"

"Knew each other in California," said Trupp smoothly, "glad to run into him here; never can tell, can you?"

Lemuel never forgot the next few moments: there sat Trupp, cool as a toad under a stone, trading talk with the man who'd be happy to hang him if he only knew. It surpassed any situation one had ever thought of till there started a small cloud of doubt that grew and grew till it overshadowed everything else. Was this visit really by chance—had anyone—? Was it possible that Begbie actually did know—? Was Sergeant Lindsay outside and not alone—?

At this the gambler made a swallowing sound, took a quick glance, another, and the nightmare faded. No, it wasn't possible; never had the man of law been more affable; there he was, the most human judge that ever sent anyone to the gallows, expressing goodwill to mankind in general.

"In my experience," he was saying, "it's the unexpected that brings men together. Well, Mr. Flint, thanks to Billy Barker the Cariboo has taken new life. I trust you will find some suitable occupation."

That, thought Lemuel, was pretty decent; the tension relaxed. Trupp, too, had relaxed a shade though his narrow eyes were keen. They got to talking, and Lemuel allowed he couldn't do much now except read, and Trupp said, "You did a lot of that in Sacramento;" so you'd think they'd lived together there; and Lemuel said, "That's right, though not nearly as much as I wanted to, but I reckon to catch up this winter." While they talked the Judge tucked away Trupp's face and figure in his memory, he didn't think much of this stranger who hadn't any marks of labour and evidently lived on his wits like Lemuel. But he felt sorry for Lemuel.

"Mr. Flint, to my personal knowledge you have a liking for poetry. Have you any favourite character?"

Lemuel said he had a leaning to young Hamlet, he didn't quite know why, but he could understand how Hamlet felt, and the piece about the undiscovered country went right

home especially in a place like the Cariboo with winter coming on.

That interested the Judge, and when he learned that Lemuel had stopped there because it depressed him, he took out the Shakespeare. "Listen to this," he said in a rich, deep voice:—

"Thus conscience doth make cowards of us all,
And thus the native hue of resolution
Is sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought,
And enterprises of great pith and moment,
With this regard, their currents turn awry
And lose the name of action."

When he got this far he looked up at Trupp:

"Mr. Hollis, what do you make of that? I'd like to know."

Coming from where it did, it got Trupp a little flustered; he'd met other judges before, but he was always in the dock, with no opinions invited, and to be consulted across the table took him unawares.

"I don't make much of it," he said, "a man's either a coward or he isn't: I don't reckon conscience has much to do with it."

"I see. Of course Shakespeare was considering only those who possess such a thing: if it's possible to be without one, that individual must be treated accordingly. What do you think, Mr. Flint?"

"Well, sir, I guess you could dig out of Shakespeare remarks that no living man could sidestep, if you get me."

Begbie smiled at that. "I agree with you," he paused, then passed over the book, "keep it; there's no better companion for a lonely man. I've another copy."

When he said this something got right up in Lemuel, hissing at him, "Now you darn fool, now's your chance; Trupp won't shoot for fear of hitting the Judge; it won't come again, and you're booked for a rope round your

neck, so for God's sake speak out." That's what the voice said, but there was Trupp, hand on his gun, body all set to jump for the door; the shape of his mouth made Lemuel feel sick, so the moment passed; he took the book and said:—

"I'm mighty glad to have it."

"Then we are both content," nodded the Judge, "Mr. Hollis, have you recently arrived here?"

Trupp said yes; he'd been looking over some claims on Grouse Creek, but couldn't decide with prices so high, and the Judge answered that the outside world was looking that way too. In his opinion prices would be still higher next year, with costs down when the new road was open with stages through to Quesnel Mouth, which meant a much safer journey.

"Is that so?" said Trupp.

"Yes, because it's impossible to police a mere trail four hundred miles long. The stages will carry iron boxes with an armed guard. You see, Mr. Hollis, in a mixed population like this one may well rub shoulders with an outlaw and be none the wiser."

Lemuel's throat tightened, but the deep voice had not altered a fraction, while the large, calm eyes turned from one to the other asking did they not agree. Trupp's nostrils had whitened, a crease showed in his coatsleeve, his fingers were again on the gun, and never had Lemuel known a more trigger-like situation. So he had to say something.

"I guess that's happened more'n once, but from all accounts we've seen the last of it round here."

"Mr. Flint, you are an optimist; I fear the trouble is not over yet. Now I must be moving on, so good-night to you. Mr. Hollis, I trust your activities among us will earn their due reward."

Saying this, he hardly looked at the other man, but put out his left hand to Lemuel who for once didn't think quick enough to do the same, then recovered to get a warm clasp;

it conveyed that the Judge understood how things were, and sympathised. The past was forgotten, he hoped affairs would go pretty well, and this gesture on the part of one to whom he could mean so little nearly choked Lemuel; he wanted with all his soul to take the one and only chance, to shout the truth, but there again was Trupp like a lynx ready to spring, shoot and run for it, and he, Lemuel, was the one to be shot, and—well—it just wasn't good enough. Then the Judge went out.

"What do you make of that?" said Trupp harshly.

"Make? Why, nothing. Ever see him before?"

"Once, but he didn't see me."

"I guess we were both rattled: at the same time he don't fancy your looks."

That seemed to amuse Trupp, then he glanced round the cabin with cold eyes. "Forget it—forget what I said about the Cunningham; I felt like he was reading my thoughts; we'll postpone it for a while. You'll hear from me again, maybe not till next spring, but you'll hear. I'm in your hands—maybe: you're in mine—for sure."

"Where'll I find you?" said Lemuel thinly.

"You won't; I'll find you. I wouldn't go out to-night if I was you—understand?"

*after dawn
scene*

Winter Comes to the Cariboo

WINTER came to the Cariboo like an old man to a cringing bride: without sound or storm it crept, first a sort of nakedness when one perceived what the earth was made of, then as though this revelation were indecent she drew from the clouds a thin Arctic shroud with which to screen herself. Pools congealed in the tumbled hills, the wild chorus of mountain torrents diminished, the woods were hushed.

Imperceptibly the shroud thickened till the north had no sharp angles left; land and water wedded in stark communion; cariboo and mule deer deserted the land to traverse the lakes, clicking hooves in narrow grooves rutting the powdery plain. The shroud buried a thousand familiar things, proffering nothing in their place; the marks of men's toil were effaced by its nerveless touch; sounds carried far; tall, grey wolves talked to the moon by night on lonely ridges; white-burdened spruce in whose flat frondage yet nestled a suggestion of warmth flung blue shadows on unwrinkled drifts; ivory-beaked ravens explored the silence on ragged wings.

Snow lay deep in the crazy street of Richfield with a single furrow down its centre, another along the plank walk past a quarter mile of empty, eggshell buildings. On the creek banks where was an inhabited cabin there climbed a feather of pearl grey smoke like the exhalation of humans sheltering within; a sort of rabbit trail led to its door from the deeper one whose straggling curves bound together the sparse population; after a windy night this would be filled

level and re-established by men on snowshoes, their piston-like legs tramping heavily.

On Lower Williams some work continued where shafts had been started well before the snow came and were now down below the frost line, the deepest of these being Cameron's who reckoned to hit bed-rock in another fifteen feet. He had no doubt of this. The stuff he sent up froze instantly, so the dump made an enlarging sandwich of snow and gravel, with the collar of the shaft cased in ice. So sure of success was Cameron that he had built a water wheel with a flume to feed it and do the hoisting. But now there was no water.

On Upper Williams Dan did his best, but was too near the surface; the creek bed, frozen to a cemented pudding, rang at the stroke of a pick, so they were mosquitos assaulting a stone slab, though you could loosen a little with a bar. The shallow pit kept drifting full, so Dan made a shelter over to the south, but that didn't help much. After two weeks he gave it up, and with Harper started getting out timber for the shaft they'd put down next Spring.

There were days when one could only keep under cover and make the best of it, when gales whipped the snow from Jack of Clubs Lake, and the ice expanded, zigzagging in long ragged ridges with a fusilade like random gun-fire more and more distant; nights when frost struck to the heart of trees, splitting their core with rifle-like reports; and these were periods when Ma Bowers felt hard put to hold things together. She had laboured to believe in what she was doing here—and couldn't: she had an awareness of much that she couldn't sort out, of a waste of time never to be recaptured, expended energy never to be replaced. Dan pictured himself knocking at a treasure-house door, but to her secret heart he was a mouse nibbling at a mountain. She had a rooted faith in the fairness of life for decent people, but that was hard to maintain here.

She'd talk to God about this in odd moments with no

definite results: God seemed to reply that when they started off she'd asked help to follow her man, that being what a woman was meant for. Well, she'd done this, not weakened so far, and was it reasonable to ask divine aid every time she changed her mind? No, she'd exhausted that tribunal, which gave her a sensation of defencelessness and made the Cariboo lonelier than ever.

In such hours, too, it was not to her own she could turn for relief. She loved them, loved having them near her, but that very nearness robbed them of originality; she knew them too well, so they didn't supply what she needed. Love, she concluded, love of most any kind was just love; you could trade love for love but not for brains, that's all there was to it. Married folks would dodge a heap of friction and disappointment if they started off with that idea.

She thought a great deal about Mary and young Harper: he had arranged to live with Oliver, but when she heard of this she wouldn't have it, he must come to them. With Dan he could sleep in the bigger room, paying what was fair. To her surprise he didn't accept at once, and when she learned why she liked him all the more.

"It's Mary," he said.

"Not too sure of yourself, Harry?"

"Yes—and no," he floundered a little, "I want to see her all the time and she—well—"

"Ain't asked her to marry you?"

"No, but I intimated a month ago how things stood."

"You're a nice boy," said she, "but there's more needed."

"Mrs. Bowers—" he hesitated— "there was a change in my affairs when I got that letter."

"Things brightening up for your folks? Must be if they raised the cash to bring you home."

"The money was always there," he said awkwardly, "I should have explained before."

Ma regarded him with sharp, bright eyes. "Harry Harper, you've been putting something over on us. If you're

reckoning on marrying our Mary we've a right to know more'n we do."

Feeling guilty, he told her what he had told the Judge; she didn't take her eyes from him. How queer, she thought, to be able to go back home and live easy all one's life without working, but for herself she failed to visualise a workless life.

"So that's it. Why didn't you tell me before?"

"I meant to wait till I had something I didn't owe to anyone else."

"That's right enough too—now listen a minute."

"What, Mrs. Bowers?"

"I'm kind of satisfied, yet I'm not."

"I'll tell you whatever else there is."

"No, I'm telling you something. You'll pass, Harry—you're all right—but it's the other side that worries me. You're not like us—I knew that the minute I saw you—but the difference don't count as far as I'm concerned. It's Mary that counts, and your folks may be different from you. I guess they're bound to be if they've stayed put over there in England all their lives, and I don't blame 'em either. Suppose you married daughter right now—though I wouldn't stand for that—not for one minute—you'd know what you were getting, but they wouldn't. Are you figuring to take her back there—maybe?"

"Why not?"

"I'll tell you: first thing that'd happen your folks would look at her sideways wondering who's this backwoods American that's roped in our Harry."

"That's a wild idea, Mrs. Bowers."

"Might seem so the way you feel now, but I'd bet on it. The Cariboo's one place, the Old Country another, and—"

"You're worrying about nothing at all, Ma, if I can call you that." Then he kissed her.

At this she dabbed her eyes, gave him a clap on the shoulder:—

"Don't get too free with that round here—it ain't safe. I just want to feel fortified. Your folks know anything about all this?"

"I wasn't saying a word till I knew more myself. A letter went out with the Judge telling them I was here, and thanks for the money, and that I wasn't coming home just yet—that's all."

"Maybe you're wiser than I figured. I'd let it go at that. Right now you think you're in love, but ain't quite sure, and it's just because daughter's the only girl of her kind round here. With her—well—I don't know—she's said mighty little about it—but she's not going to be hurt if I can help it."

"I wouldn't—"

"No, I guess not, so just keep as brotherly as you know how. See?"

That sent him off smiling, Ma was smiling too; she felt she had reduced matters to a workable basis, and would wait till Mary chose to bring the subject up again. Then something clicked in her brain, a sort of cold wave hit her face, and she realized the rest of it.

"Our Mary!" she whispered, "daughter to a fugitive criminal! Dear God! Am I crazy—or what?"

She was appalled, breathless; the dissolving dream left her in a fog of doubt. The first instinct was to face reality, call Harper back now, quickly, and get it over, and she was about to do this when of a sudden her courage left her. With a sort of desperate violence she assured herself that there must be some other way; she'd hunt till she found it; meantime she was in a net woven of loving, well-meant acts that somehow had gone all wrong, but she could not wreck the happiness of those two, and she couldn't tell Dan either. The only shred of comfort she could find was in what the Judge said about Michael Trupp having left the district.

In these days of self-questioning she found most relief

in talking to Johnny. He had practically hibernated; he'd eat once a day, sleep for maybe twenty hours, eat, rest again in a sort of suspended animation like a black bear till his flat stomach signalled for further attention. He had considered clearing out his coffin to sleep in to keep off the draughts—in case he passed out before he woke he'd be right there and no trouble to anyone—but hated to soil the velvet cushion. Sometimes, after he'd eaten, he'd plough over through the snow, and sit blinking like an owl in sunlight.

Ma welcomed these visits; she'd hear him outside, stamping; he'd come in muffled to the eyes, beard tucked inside his coat, stretch his long legs towards the fire. When he'd absorbed a little warmth, he'd send her one of his wicked little smiles and start talking about anything that came into his head.

One day she spoke to him about the reading club and Lemuel.

"I ain't seen him not for a solid month," he drawled. "He's sort of dug in, but I'll yank him out if you say so."

"Couldn't we start those readings soon?"

"Sure—any time. How many do you reckon on?"

"There's you and Mr. Flint and Oliver, Jack Lennard, Mr. Cameron and—"

"Count him out; he figures he's too near bed-rock to think of anything else."

"Then Mr. Dexter with others from Mr. Barker's claim and us four—that's quite a crowd for the Cariboo."

"I got the hind leg of a mule deer that'll come in handy. Jack shot her three weeks ago. Ain't forgetting Sing, are you?"

"No, if he'll come."

"What was you intending to read?"

"With Mr. Flint so fond of poetry I thought we'd leave that to him."

"Poetry'll suit Sing as well as anything else," chuckled the old man. "When do you want it?"

"A week from to-night'll be Christmas Eve," said Ma softly.

"That's so too; well, we'll fix it. You tell Harper to round up Billy's camp—the walking's pretty heavy for me. How's Dan feeling these days?"

"Just the same; he's quit shovelling snow on the Jacket, and getting out timber. Oh, Johnny," she breathed, "I wish the winter was over, seems it never will be and we've only just started."

"Fewer winters left the longer they git, eh?"

"I suppose so; I wish the Judge were here."

"I was ruminatin' about him last night; took me right back to when I was young, and my Pa took me to New York; I uster sit on a bench watching the harbour. You'd see one of them little tugboats go fussin' round through schooners and fishin' smacks an' suchlike at anchor making a lot of noise like she was pretty important; then some real big feller maybe just in from Yurup or Afriky would pass along easy and deep and kind of stately, no fuss about her, and you'd see all the little ones draw in towards her like they wanted to follow. Well, that's what the Judge is—one of them real big fellers."

"Yes, I know," she answered raggedly, "and down in Victoria they tell me there's roses the year round, and Marta's there, and all the others with sense enough to go out when they could, and when I think—"

"You quit thinking right now, ma'am," said Johnny sharply, "you got too much brains to think—if you follow me. I've an idea that what folks do or don't do is all wrote down for 'em somewheres, an' if you go ferretin' round for the next page you get all snarled up. The only time I ever heard the Reverend Sheepshanks orate he began reading 'sufficient unto the day is the calamities thereof.' I was near asleep, but he wasn't so far out."

"Perhaps you're right."

"You bet I'm right. Take the Red Jacket—no darn use

to anyone—but you’ve a pretty fair man for a husband, an’ a real nice girl, an’ a young man itchin’ to take her off your hands, an’ grub enough to see you through, an’ believe me that’s more’n a lot of others can say. Now I’m going round to shake up that left-handed gambler. He ain’t much prospects, has he?”

Thus delivered, Mr. Knott stowed away his beard, tightened his muffler and set out, a long, dark, angular figure across a sparkling counterpane, his breath spouting in jets. It was cold, but he liked it, would suck in the stinging air, feel its chill in his breast and think, “by Gorry! I’m as good a man as ever I was.”

The trail lay heavy; Richfield a dead, ghostly town; frost-rimmed windows caught the light of the westerly sun giving false life to its desolation. Up on the flank of Cow Mountain he could see a black speck where Jack Lennard was felling trees for charcoal; towards Canadian Creek, where timber grew heavier he caught the faint whine of a two-man saw, but save for this there came no sound. The Red Jacket had drifted flat; Upper Williams was a frozen depression broken by shaft houses on the Cunningham, Bill Deitz, Six Toed Pete and other rich claims. Nothing stirred there.

Nearing Marta’s cabin he noted that the only recent tracks led from door to woodpile, which was significant.

“Kind of hermit!” he murmured, knocked and went in to find Lemuel sitting at the table with a pencil and blank copybook—no writing that one could see. At sight of Johnny he looked surprised, then pleased. Johnny thought he seemed mighty spruce—considering, and the condition of the cabin was neat and orderly as one could imagine.

“Come right in, Mr. Knott; glad to see you.”

“Well, I’m certainly glad to get here—it’s one cold day—going to be colder. How’re you making out, Mr. Flint?”

“Fairly well. How’s yourself?”

“Catching right up with my sleep; eighteen hours a day

solid, sometimes more, but 'with only five hours daylight that's natural. How about you?"

"Considerable less; I don't sleep so well."

"What do you do with yourself the rest of the time? Find it kind of lonely, don't you?"

"No, sir, it don't materialise like that; there's the chores and cooking; also I've got quite a few of the poets here, and just browse round. I find that educating. Remember what the poet, Mr. Bill Wordsworth, said?"

"Never heard of him."

"When from our better selves we have too long
been parted by the hurrying world, and droop,
sick of its business, of its pleasures tired,
how gracious, how benign, is Solitude."

repeated Lemuel in a quiet voice. "That suits me right down to the ground."

"Well, admitted Mr. Knott, "it sounds good, but it don't work that way with me. I just drop off. Anything else on your mind?"

"I am occupied," answered Lemuel with his old dignity, "also I contemplate writing a book."

"Here in the Cariboo!" Johnny looked stupefied.

"Yes, sir, a book; also I've devoted time to this present from the Judge—it's Shakespeare."

"Oh, that fellow!" Johnny recovered in a flash, "I kind of like him myself."

"You—you know his works?"

"Sure—why not? remember them lines for his tombstone?

'Good friend for Jesus' sake forbear
to dig the dust enclosed here.'

Good, ain't they? Wrote 'em himself before he passed over. What kind of a book do you figure to write?"

"I have not decided yet."

“Write her left-handed?”

Lemuel winced; he had been keeping the bad hand out of sight.

“Yes, sir, and I guess the first book ever wrote in the Cariboo.”

“Lemme know when she’s finished. Say, let’s see that fist of yours.”

Hesitating, Lemuel held it out while the old man pressed gently with a knowing touch.

“Sort of resembles one I seen back East, only worse; them fingers might come straighter if you cared for ’em proper, but that’s not saying they’d qualify for the pasteboards. You knead ’em gently like that—he began to massage till there came a faint tingle where before no life seemed to stir—“keep that up reglar, an’ you’re liable to get results. I uster clean up after a surgeon, an’ know what’s inside.”

“That’s certainly kind of you, Mr. Knott. Doc Flattery said I might as well forget that hand.”

“Shucks! doc got a new saw last August, so you’re darn lucky he didn’t take her off. Now I’m goin’ to talk right out. Maybe you’ve been ruminating about what folks is thinking of you—is that right?”

Mr. Flint admitted that this was unavoidable.

“Well, forget it; folks are too interested in their own affairs to spend any time on yours. Now you listen to me. I got a business proposition, also an invite.”

Lemuel doubted his own ears; this was the second proposition since life had changed, and here in the Cariboo! The invitation could be from only one source. What could that mean? But the pale blue eyes of this shrewd old man conveyed nothing but friendliness, and anything that lifted one out of the present pool of loneliness was welcome. So he waited.

“I’ve an idea,” went on Johnny, “a darn good one too. It’s a partnership.”

"With—with you?"

"Sure."

"In—in—?"

"Planting stiffs; what's more I'm not taking any kind of partner—got to be something special because I'm booked for competition next year. If I don't smarten up my trade, I won't hold it. That's where you come in."

"Me!"

"Why not?" Next year this town can afford more fancy funerals than ever it did, and there's nothing sets off the occasion, an' shows more real regard for the departed than having a tall feller with a face like yours under a tall hat, an' black gloves, an' a long, square-tailed coat, taking charge an' herding the casket the right way soon as the carpenter work is done. He ain't got to be downright broken-hearted, but just naturally mournful, an' if you was short an' fat with a frozen grin it wouldn't work worth a cent, but made the way you are it's a cinch. I ain't going to take backwater from Victoria in the interment business, not if I know it."

Here he glanced expectantly at Lemuel, and didn't understand what he saw; the gambler had a strange expression and was gazing at some mid-air point between them. Could it be, he seemed to ask himself, that Johnny really meant this—Johnny whose chief mission in life was playing host to the corpses of the Cariboo? Did this old man with tobacco-stained beard think him fit only to follow the dead? But there sat Johnny looking far more alive than himself, with only childlike enthusiasm in his eyes.

"It's—it's very, very kind of you, Mr. Knott."

"No it ain't," Johnny didn't like being called kind, "it's straight business, darn good business if it's run proper. Mr. Flint, that trade goes right down into human emotions, an' if you can handle them emotions without getting any-ways flustered yourself there's a pile of money in it. I've proved this."

"I certainly appreciate what you said," stammered Lemuel, "and can I think it over?" Then, feeling the need for more response, "Maybe the interment business isn't as depressing as—?"

"Pilgrim, do I look depressed? No, sir, there's dignity in it, an' my clients look a sight more dignified than they did before they came my way. Well, there's nothing doing now before the geese fly north, and say, when you've got a good holt I'll retire an' you take the whole shebang."

"I'll—I'll certainly think about it."

"Now that's out of the way, there's an invite to the Bowers for Christmas eve; it's a reading party. She allows you're well eddicated, an' oughter preside an' do the reading."

"Me preside!"

"Why not? It's a trial trip first time, an' she's set on it. She reckons you'll read poetry. Your funeral, pardner; it's a kind of friendly gathering with a bite to eat after the trouble's over."

At this something strange and unexpected welled up in Lemuel, like a cord round his heart being slackened releasing a warm current that crept through him, so he sat for a moment saying nothing—a moment he always remembered. In it he saw himself shedding off his old self and becoming the kind of man that used to seem possible before he learned how to palm an ace; and it was not too late, for people had been thinking about him differently from what he imagined. The first to do this were those he had fooled and robbed; so now he'd tell Mrs. Bowers what had happened on the *Brother Jonathan* and give her the two thousand that was in the tin box under his bunk. And, by God! he'd write out a statement for the Judge about Michael Trupp, and if next year there was nothing for him except walking behind a corpse in a tall hat, then, by God, he'd do that too!

But—and this brought him up short—what about Mary—whose father he had vowed to kill?

At once the warm tide of hope seemed to slacken. It ebbed. Gradually he felt cold and tired. He saw the mud floor, log walls, the old undertaker with yellowing beard. This was all real, all actual. He could touch it. His fingers were stiffening again. That was real too. Now, confronted with this reality that summed up everything he had to show after thirty-three years of living, the dream faded.

So he did not speak or stir when Johnny got up, fixed his scarf, and let in a chilling blast.

“Judas priest! but she’s a snorter. So long, Mr. Flint—see you Christmas eve.”



13

The Reading Party

THE people who spent that winter in the Cariboo felt very small; they were so much smaller than the bigness around them. When it's like this, when the warmth has gone out of the world, people cling together to share each other's life warmth, and find comfort in watching each other being alive. You mustn't do anything to make another not want to stay close because that lessens the general warmth; it's like a family of mink or foxes or otters sleeping in a heap in a burrow—if one moves away the whole family gets cold—and like the otters and foxes and mink your burrow is just big enough to hold you so the warmth doesn't escape, with food and firewood nearby so you can pretty well put out your hand and touch them.

When you are away from the rest it gives you a little warmth just to see another human coming towards you. Being in a crowd anywhere in a city isn't like this; a thousand herded there have no meaning, you're nothing to them, you can't tell anything about them, they don't give you the life warmth like a very few will elsewhere. But if you haven't lived the other life yourself you won't know about this.

You got it at the first meeting of the reading club on Christmas Eve—a stinging night with the stars high, the Cariboo crackling, Lower Williams lying open to the moon with a couple of lanterns burning at the mouth of Jack Cameron's shaft. The Bowers' cabin was as clean as could be, curtains drawn back against the window so you could see the nasturtiums in flower with their strong yellow bloom. Dan had laid a new hearth of flat slabs so neatly

that you could hardly make out where the joints came. The table was pushed back in a corner; there were five chairs, cariboo skins on the floor; the hind leg of a mule deer roasted on an iron rod that ran across the fireplace; the rod bent at one end so you could give it a half turn. Underneath sat a shallow pan to catch the dripping. Ma had baked a big sourdough bannock with a brown crust; there was a can of syrup from Oliver, with a pot of marmalade and tin of English biscuits from Dexter—these had come round the Horn.

Ma was all fussed up, so tightly laced that now and then she'd take a deep breath to make sure all was safe. She wore her blue polonaise with a couple of small hoops and fringe trimming, and a bodice that Dan thought pretty low for a woman of her age, but she liked it; there was an edging of lace, and you could see where the tanned skin ran into the white of her breast. With her soft brown hair in a bun she was more like thirty than forty-two. Jack Lennard had drilled holes in the two Red Jacket nuggets. She had one, Mary the other.

Mary looked pretty; she had a nice 'mouth, sweet but firm, a little turned up at the corners, a clear skin that never got tanned, brown eyes and small square wrists. Her feet were very small. She was dressed like Ma, but younger; her face was more oval than Ma's, and when she smiled she was more like Dan.

Oliver sat on the floor: Johnny had gone round that afternoon to look him over, making him wash with carbolic dog soap, so he smelled of that instead of Barnee. Johnny sat beside Jack Lennard; Jack's hands and neck were traced with a pattern of black, hairlike lines under the skin that would never come out. Bob Dexter came with Hankin, the two millionaires of the party—they'd cleaned up sixty thousand since Barker went out. Cameron didn't turn up; Harper had been to see him, but he swore he was now right on top of the paystreak with water bothering, so they

worked double shift to keep it down. The shaft mouth was sheathed in ice for the water froze before it could get away; you'd think it was a baby glacier stalled in the middle of Lower Williams.

And Lemuel—there were more cuts in his face from left-handed shaving; Johnny had offered to do it—he said he'd shaved maybe fifty clients last summer and not one of them kicked—but Lemuel wouldn't have that. His face looked bluish with a pallor under the blue; he had on his best and the long shiny boots, but the coat hung loose. With his sombre eyes and hollow cheeks he might have been resurrected, but there was a lot going on inside him.

If you put a bunch of people together anywhere you've got to remember that each has some special knowledge he's keeping to himself. Take Ma—she knew that Jim Hollis was Steve Bowers, but a bull-team wouldn't drag that out of her unless she was cornered; Lemuel knew that Jim was Michael Trupp, and the same with him; young Harper knew that whatever his folks said he was going to marry Mary; Mary knew she'd sooner die than marry anyone else; Dan, very secretly, had begun to ask himself if he was a darn fool riding for a fall—while Johnny knew he was—and so on, so when people say a thing, or do it, you must allow for it being hooked up with their secret thoughts.

Anyway, Lemuel found himself in a chair in front of the fire with his book; some men were on the floor, backs to the wall. Young Harper and Mary had a cariboo skin to themselves with their shoulders touching but not that you'd notice it. The bear-grease on Oliver's hair was melting, a trickle ran over his cheeks; the hair was plastered back; he had black brows, quick black eyes as though they floated in oil, and hands like a woman for all his work. You could hear the haunch of mule deer sizzle and the fat drip.

Then Ma gave a nervous little cough; she was in the rocker, rocking slowly, fingering a little ivory fan that had lace between the ribs.

"Mr. Flint, this is just an experiment first time, but if everybody's satisfied we might go right on with it. What do you reckon we ought to start with?"

Lemuel felt gratified; he knew he was a skunk to be sitting here deceiving all these good folks, but even a skunk can feel gratified.

"Well, ma'am, I certainly appreciate being asked to your place. Mr. Knott figured we might as well start with Shakespeare—he's well acquainted with Shakespeare—and I've a presentation copy here from the Judge—so, what about this? It's a fellow called Romeo talking to his girl—she's a Miss Juliet—in a garden after sundown.

'Two of the fairest stars in all the heaven,
Having some business, do entreat her eyes
To twinkle in their spheres till they return.
What if her eyes were there, they in her head?
The brightness of her cheeks would shame those stars
As daylight doth a lamp; her eyes in heaven
Would through the airy region stream so bright
That birds would sing, and think it were not night.
See how she leans her cheek upon her hand!
O, that I were a glove upon that hand,
That I might touch that cheek!'"

He paused, took a swift glance at Harper, was content, and about to read on, when Oliver broke in:—

"Who's dat feller?"

"Name of Romeo, a Mr. Romeo Montague; she's a Capulet, Miss Juliet Capulet. There's bad blood between the two families—been laying for each other for years though that don't worry her—so they have to watch their step and meet private with her old nurse keeping a lookout for trouble. Then the girl comes back at him with this:—

"Tis but thy name that is my enemy—
Thou art thyself though, not a Montague.

What's Montague? Is it nor hand nor foot
Nor arm nor face, nor any other part
Belonging to a man. O, be some other name!
What's in a name? That which we call a rose,
By any other name would smell as sweet.'"

"Dere was somepin lak dat back in Trois Rivières where I come from," nodded Oliver, "de Lapointes dey don't mix wid de Courvoisiers, dere's pretty bad hate between dem familles, but Félice Lapointe, she ain't scared of noddings an' marry wid Marcel Courvoisier jus' de same. What happen to dem people in de book?"

"They struck a bad streak," explained Lemuel, "Miss Juliet, she takes a slug of sleeping draught being all wore out with love, and Mr. Romeo, he gets in a mix-up with a fellow called Tybalt, who's connected with Miss Juliet, and kills him, and gets ordered right out of the country. It goes on like that quite a while. He thinks his girl's dead, and is pretty downcast about killing Tybalt—y'see he hadn't a thing against him—so he takes poison, and when Miss Juliet find him she stabs herself, and lands right on top of him. They had a good start but a poor finish."

"There's power in that stuff," said Dan, "where do you suppose he got it?"

"Out of a great brain, Mr. Bowers; there's a lot more about them—pages of it."

"Kind of gloomy, strikes me," interjected Johnny, "try something where there ain't no poison or knife work."

"Mr. Flint's presiding, so you let him choose anything he's a mind to," said Ma briskly. "It's just whatever you pick, Mr. Flint."

"Well, ma'am, personally I've a leaning to Hamlet, but if Mr. Knott—?"

"Go right on, pilgrim."

"Then Hamlet—he was a Prince, Prince of Denmark.

He weren't married, and kind of thoughtful; he'd think up all kinds of things and—"

"Meaning Mr. Shakespeare thought 'em up for him?"

"Sure, this whole book is full of stuff he thought up for other folks, that's what makes real poetry; you think up something pretty good, then sort of manufacture someone to put the thoughts into, otherwise I guess the poet would choke to death."

"Don't give a man much time to attend to his own affairs, does it? What about this Hamlet anyway?"

"Listen:—

'To be, or not to be, that is the question:
Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer
The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune,
Or to take arms against a sea of troubles,
And by opposing end them? To die—to sleep—
No more, and by a sleep to say we end
'The heartache, and the thousand natural shocks
That man is heir to, 'tis a consummation
Devoutly to be wisht. To die—to sleep—
To sleep! perchance to dream: ay, there's the rub.'"

Lemuel read well, now he had them: his voice held dignity and feeling; at this moment he wasn't Lemuel Flint, the maimed card-sharper, but a channel for immortal words: his cadaverous face, his garb, his dark mournful eyes—all had their effect; his tone was of one deeply moved while his audience became aware of a strange responsive stirring.

They all had their dreams; Ma of the slopes of Telegraph Hill, the glint on Frisco Bay; Dexter was picturing the day he'd ride south, saddlebags fat with gold; Oliver dreamed of Trois Rivières on the St. Lawrence, could hear gay French voices, the salutations of his friends, watch the big steamers heading up for Montreal; Johnny sat with his blue eyes fixed on Lemuel who would look fine in a stovepipe

hat; Lemuel himself struggled with the vision of Michael Trupp; Mary and young Harper were holding hands, not caring who saw them; Harper had learned most of Hamlet at school, but it didn't reach him then as it did now.

"This fellow Shakespeare—dead, I reckon?" hazarded Jack Lennard.

"Passed in his checks about two hundred and fifty years ago. Here's something that struck me:—

' . . . who would fardels bear
To grunt and sweat under a weary life,
But that the dread of something after death,
The undiscovered country, from whose bourne
No traveller returns, puzzles the will,
And makes us rather bear those ills we have
Than fly to others that we know not of.' "

A silence followed this, it might have been written for them all—all travellers in an undiscovered country—then Johnny gave a cackle:—

"Can't get away from gloom nohow! What was his trouble?"

"This Hamlet," explained Lemuel patiently, "was worked up because his uncle—his Pa's brother—had killed his Pa to marry his Ma. His Pa's ghost put him wise to that."

"Holy Mackerel! What happened then?"

"Well, Hamlet is rounding up his Ma for what she done, and she's sort of side-stepping when he hears like it's somebody breathing close by, and shoves his sword through a curtain, and lets daylight into a party called Mr. Polonius. He's hiding there to pick up the inside news. This party falls right out on the floor and passes in his checks, but that's only part of it. He has a daughter, Miss Ophelia Polonius, who ain't just right in the upper storey; she's unhinged, and shouldn't be round at all; when she hears Pa is dead she goes an' drowns herself. Next thing, Hamlet kills his uncle to square things for *his* Pa; his Ma takes

poison, and he has a slug of it himself. That's how it's shaping now."

"Say," protested Johnny, "that's nine people killed in two pomes! Ain't there no cheerful folks—don't anybody have a good time?"

"It's right here, Mr. Knott, you can't get away from it."

"Mebbe, but—well—hadn't poetry oughter rhyme?"

"No, sir, it don't have to, but sometimes he slings in a rhyme or two showing he can do it."

"What's dat ting you call fardel?" demanded Oliver.

"It's a bundle, or burden," said Hankin, "anything you put over your shoulder; the old people say that in Warwickshire where I come from; it's only a few miles from Shakespeare's house."

"Any of his familee dere now?"

"Not that I know of, but the house is."

"Must ha' been a first-class job to stand up all this time," nodded Johnny, "but mebbe they don't have so much snow."

Then it seemed that conversation lagged: Ma signalled to Harper hoping he'd do or say something, but he didn't, just sat there smiling at Mary, trying not to laugh, so evidently this first evening hadn't yet scored a success; Ma had done all she could, but things weren't right, and Lemuel certainly pretty gloomy, so she became anxious.

"I guess we'll have supper now, then maybe Mr. Flint'll read us something brighter."

This brought general relief, a shifting of chairs; Mary took the haunch off the spit, put it in the pan, the table was moved out, Ma made tea. Lemuel was turning pages to find something cheerful, and struck *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, but after a glance kept on turning; he didn't like the way Harper was laughing to himself: then Ma said, "Sit in, everybody," and just at that moment came a hammering at the door like somebody was pounding with his fist.

That struck them to silence—they couldn't imagine who this might be. So Dan opened the door and there was Jack Cameron plastered with snow; where his beard joined his moustache was a solid ring of ice—it was often like that in the Cariboo, and you couldn't laugh or work your jaw till the ring melted or you'd pull the hair out by the roots—his eyes were dancing: he didn't stop to stamp off the snow; he came right in carrying a little canvas sack, looked round for a minute, then gave a shout, and held up the sack, and said:—

“Boys, we've struck it—hit the pay streak!”

With that he up-ended the sack on the clean table oil-cloth: there fell out a little pile of half-frozen muck and gravel and gold!

Now if you took a group of people like these under circumstances such as these—and they were feeling gloomy, left-over, out of the world—and tried to fix something to restore their spirits, you couldn't have done what Jack Cameron did that night. Shakespeare went right out of their heads. They'd forgotten about Jack, being so used to hear him prophesy he'd hit the paystreak between sixty and sixty-five feet that it ceased to mean anything. So now that it happened it left them stupefied.

Also it was somehow quite different from Billy Barker's strike, when the news spread like a bush fire and thousands of men knew all about it within the hour: this was more private, more exclusive; there they were, just a few of them who had braved winter inside, and their first sensation was of pride at being the chosen ones. It was a reward for being here, that's how they took it to begin with, then they cheered and laughed, talked all at once, slapped Jack's back, began to figure out what this meant on top of Barker's strike, while Jack stood there grinning, feeling like a hero.

Presently he let a handful of the stuff run through his fingers, and said to Dexter:—

“Y'see what this stands for? There's thirty claims on that

half-mile with bedrock located at each end—thirty claims between you and me that can't miss it: another ten above you to the Little Canyon; fifteen more below me to the meadows. By God! that's a mile of bedrock!"

Ma said it was nice of him to be thinking of others as much as himself, and sent Dan a smile to say, "There, that's what'll happen to you next spring," though she didn't feel that way at all, and Dan grinned back; the grin was forced because this was Lower not Upper Williams, a long three miles from the Red Jacket, and didn't mean a thing to him.

Yet there was no jealousy in anyone's heart that night: what made one of them rich in pocket made all rich in spirit; that is all except Lemuel; he stood looking at the stuff, saying very little, thinking that the art in which so lately he had taken pride was just a trickery that Nature didn't approve of while she had something to say for a blind, unreasoning, bull-dog courage that didn't know when it was licked.

"Mr. Cameron," he ventured, "I certainly congratulate you."

Cameron laughed, "Maybe I'm excused for not attending the reading club," and apologised for messing up the table when it was set, then scraped the gold and gravel into a tin plate that Ma set in the middle as a Christmas decoration, saying she'd welcome being messed up oftener in the same way.

So they all sat in. It was a fine supper—lots of good things—but only Johnny seemed to have any appetite, this being his first meal for the day; the others would stop with something halfway up to look pensively at the decoration, all busy with their secret thoughts.

Presently Cameron picked out the biggest nugget for Ma.

"It's from her," his voice was a little husky, "and there's more to come: I don't forget what you did."

"I wish she was here now, Mr. Cameron."

"I've wished it every hour since she went," he was looking

straight at her as though they were alone, "she expected this."

"I know she did."

"Or I couldn't have seen it through—her will was at work on me. She loved you, Mrs. Bowers, you were the last she spoke of."

The others listened; it was like a man opening his heart right in front of them, not caring if they did hear, for in a place like the Cariboo you aren't ashamed of your heart; Ma didn't care either, and said:—

"I learned a lot from her, Mr. Cameron; she shamed me, she never asked for a single thing."

"One, Mrs. Bowers, just one."

"Oh! I remember that."

"Now she's going to get it."

Everyone knew what he meant: it had run through the Cariboo, folks talked a lot about it, reckoning the thing out of the question, and Sophy not quite herself when she asked it, so now there was a kind of silence when Cameron turned to Hankin:—

"Charley, how's my credit?"

"Credit!" said Hankin, "you're the last man in the Cariboo needing that; I guess you're worth a million right now."

"Maybe I am." Cameron was in no way excited. "Next summer by the looks of things we'll clean up three hundred ounces a day, but till then I want ten thousand dollars as a loan. I'll sign for it."

Now ten thousand was a lot to most people but not to Hankin, and he said, "Fifty pounds of gold, eh? Sure, you can have it any time. You going out, Jack?"

"Yes, but not past Victoria this time. The wife's coming too."

It was just as though Sophy was all packed up ready for the trip, as indeed she was; then he lifted his hand to all, and made for the door leaving the plate of gold and gravel

and black sand where it lay: at the door he hesitated a minute:—

“She’ll wait in Victoria till I get back next fall, then we’ll start for Cornwall. Thanks everybody—thanks Charley. I’ll be ready day after to-morrow.”

Jack kept his promise. At sun-up two days later you’d see people standing at cabin doors, the men bareheaded. Cameron had a crew of sixteen, young Harper amongst them; he was paying ten dollars a day and grub, reckoning to start back in six weeks when the worst of the winter was past. The gang would change off from hauling to breaking trail: there were three toboggans, two with grub and tents. The other with Sophy came last. Johnny had made a wooden casket to fit over the metal one, it was lashed down under some cariboo skins as though to keep the little woman warm, and day after day she’d crunch ahead pushing a little curl of dry snow like foam: every night she’d rest near the camp fire, but not too near; a bluejay would light on the casket, tilt its glossy head, wonder what was inside. For the first night or two it would be strange to have her there, but the gang would soon get used to it, she’d just be one of the party; down by Williams Lake she’d lurch, and along the Thompson, marked by many an Argonaut wintering halfway out, over the slopes of Buonaparte Creek, and so through Hell’s Gate to the Pacific.

When they drew abreast of the Bowers’ cabin where Dan stood with Ma and Mary and Johnny, the women with shawls over their heads, Cameron waved but did not speak.

“Well,” said Ma, “I never saw anything like that before, but of course he promised. I’ll remember it all my life.”

“Does it matter so much anyway,” asked Mary, tightening her lips.

“What, daughter?”

“Where she’s buried.”

“It ain’t exactly your funeral. There’s a heap of things not worth remembering, but this ain’t one of them.”

Mary was watching Harper with Sophy's toboggan: she hadn't wanted him to go; why leave a living, loving woman for a dead one who meant nothing to him? Why shatter the winter paradise she'd counted on? But he'd been firm—good money—couldn't afford to miss it.

"Well, Mr. Cameron may have promised, but it isn't fair of the dying to ask so much. You wouldn't want Dan to do it for you."

"Not for a minute, but that's Mr. Cameron's business; he's trying to make up for what he couldn't do before. What do you think, Johnny?"

Johnny put on his minkskin cap, tied the earflap strings under the roots of his beard:—

"That outfit is costing a hundred an' sixty a day without grub; they'll eat like a pack of wolves; what they'll drink on the way out ain't in human knowledge to forecast: to land the deceased in Victoria an' get them fellers back will cost all of ten thousand. I guess Jack's emotions has clean run away with him."

"It's his money," snapped Ma.

"Sure, maybe three days' clean-up next summer, but towing a departed female four hundred miles from here to Yale simply ain't human. Well, anyway, there she goes."

The crawling line reached a bend, all leaning a little forward, arms swinging in the snowshoe stride: the dark figures, cut clean like a bas-relief, had a sort of dignity; you could see the steam of their breathing in jets, hear the crunch of shoes. Just to start with, maybe because they were watched, there was no talking or laughing, but that wouldn't continue; you couldn't expect a man on ten dollars a day with grub and drink to keep his trap shut. And who ever heard of a funeral procession three weeks long?

•At the bend, Cameron halted and waved. Then all were lost to sight.

14

Some Secret Thoughts of Lemuel Flint

ONE day in January when the stove was going full blast and everything snapping outside, Ma put aside her knitting, and took a long thoughtful look at Mary. Dan had gone after spruce partridge, and they had the cabin to themselves.

"What's on your mind, daughter? Maybe I know."

"I expect you do, Ma."

"He's liable to be back next month, if that's it."

"And if he is?"

"You'll feel better if you talk right out: keep a thing to yourself too long, and it's liable to go sour on you." The voice was gentle, because she knew what to expect.

"Then I don't know if I love him or not: I'd like to, but somehow—? I don't believe he loves me at all, really, and is afraid to say so. That's why he went out with Mr. Cameron. Even before that he was off every day shooting."

"Well, daughter, that kind of fits in with what I think. Did ever he say right out that he did love you? Needn't tell me unless you want to."

"Not like that. How was it with you and Dan—how did it start—didn't you know for a while—or what?"

"That weren't a case of guessing with either of us," said Ma softly. "His folks lived just a couple of farms from mine. Looking back, I guess it settled itself."

"Are your folks there now?"

"I suppose so," nodded Mrs. Bowers, aware that she must tread cautiously, "but it's a long time ago, an' that's a long was from Frisco. You get pretty well cut off when you cross the Prairies, so we don't hear from 'em."

"Then I'd have some relations there—cousins?"

"Maybe, yes, I guess there'll be cousins."

"It seems queer that we're—well—just ourselves. Was Dan the only son?"

"Yes," lied Ma with a voiceless petition for forgiveness, "the only son."

"Why did he come west?"

Mrs. Bowers waited before answering while the sea of loving deception on which she had long since embarked grew even wider, the course more perilous: ahead lay reefs, shoals and rocks any one of which might bring disaster, so she compounded a course that even to her own ears sounded natural.

"There's no living woman can explain why a man does this or that. On Dan's farm the land got sort of worked out, so we moved to another section of Ohio, the one you remember. Soon after that he got the wandering foot—he was never a born farmer with the feel of the land in him, and quite a lot of folks had their eyes set west. I hadn't any mind to hold him down, so we started."

"But none of the relations came west with us—why was that?"

"Daughter, you can search me."

"Will we go back east when we get out of this?"

"Maybe—depends on the Red Jacket," said Ma stoutly.

"And if the Jacket doesn't—?"

"Pan out? I don't know that much yet; it might be Telegraph Hill: anyway there's three of us all able to work, so why worry. Now I'm going over to see someone who has a sight more to depress him than we have. Better come along."

"Mr. Flint?"

"Yes; we ain't set eyes on him since the reading party. That young man has come through a pretty tough time and seems all the better for it. I'd say he's set to make good."

"I wish Harry was—"

"What, daughter?"

"More like him in—in some ways. He's not as old as I thought; Johnny told me he was thirty-two. And he's writing a book!"

"For the land's sake! What about?"

"I don't know—it's just a book."

"Well, I guess he's learned enough about human nature to fill a book."

"Marta wants to marry him. I could see it from the way she talked before she went out; she was fixing up the cabin, doing all sorts of things she'd never done for herself."

"It'd never work—he's got too much brain for Marta: she'd just be a sort of slave, and smother him all up with love, an' not understand half of him. There's things about that man that—well—" here she hesitated a moment—"I had quite a talk with him right after he got hurt. He thinks a lot of you too—he'd do most anything for you—told me that."

"But I've never done a single thing for him."

"It don't work that way. Take the case of poor Mr. Donald—no obligation there. He'd be the most surprised man in the world if anyone came along an' said, 'Here, Mr. Flint, I want to do something for you—what shall it be?'"

"I felt pretty mean that time we went to see Mr. Donald. But that was Harry."

"Well, there's the difference: Harry's too quick to criticise, while Mr. Flint—"

"Was it to help us he put that money in the Red Jacket?"

"Looks like it, don't it?"

"But that business on the steamboat—was he mixed up in it more than going round with that hat?"

"Daughter, you've got me there, but anything I felt is washed out some time ago. Now we'd better be moving—the sun sets round three o'clock."

At sight of them Lemuel for once lost his poise. "Why

Mrs. Bowers!" he stammered, looking flushed, incredulous, "this is a surprise—I never expected—come right in."

"Haven't seen you for more'n a fortnight," Ma shook the snow from her skirts, "so we dropped round for a little visit seeing as you haven't dropped in on us. How do you find yourself these short days, Mr. Flint?"

"Pretty well, ma'am, considering. Miss Mary, I'd say the Cariboo agrees with you."

"Well, it isn't nearly as bad as I thought, and winter's about half over. How's your hand? Johnny was telling us you ought to give it friction."

"Mr. Knott wasn't far out, and I'm certainly obliged for the inquiry. I have been giving it friction, and that does help; the fingers are limbering up. See?"

Ma took the hand, flexed the fingers, nodded: her touch brought with it a strange and infinitely welcome sensation unlike anything he had before experienced, and he thrilled to it.

"That's good, Mr. Flint, now you keep it up; there's no saying you won't have good use of the hand again in spite of what the Doc said—those medicals don't know everything."

"I'm hoping you're right, Mrs. Bowers."

"Just you wait and see. Say, I've never thanked you for the reading the other night: it's kind of historical when you consider the way things finished up with Mr. Cameron blowing in with all that gold. I'll never forget it. We appreciate your help, and I'm figuring on another if we can count on you."

"My privilege, ladies. I hope you don't think my selections were kind of sombre? They sort of missed fire with Mr. Knott."

"No—no—I liked it all," smiled Mary, "it's nice to have a man out here who can read as you do."

"'Tain't every man has the audience I had." Lemuel made a formal little bow. "Now it'd be a pleasure to make some tea."

"Don't trouble, Mr. Flint."

"Yes, do," laughed Ma, "it'd be just right. First time I've had tea outside our own shack."

"Can't I help?" asked Mary.

"No, miss, won't be a minute."

Lemuel, greatly pleased, set the kettle on the stove. "Sit right where you are: it's certainly a pleasure to have you here, and I can do this blindfold. First time I've entertained ladies since I don't know when."

She watched him with growing interest; his movements were very quiet, very neat: the cups were hanging from little hooks on a rack, saucers stood on edge behind them. Marta's china. There was a sort of dignity in all he did, and his dark eyes were very thoughtful. She noted the delicacy of his touch, moving things without noise. No woman, she thought, could have been more deft. And, while she watched, Mrs. Bowers' glance rested on her with a whimsical little smile.

"There's my copy of Shakespeare if you ladies care to look at it—presentation from the Judge before he went out."

"That's one fine man, Mr. Flint; I've often wondered what the Cariboo would be like without him."

"Yes, ma'am, so have I. He and I were talking things over one day soon after I struck this place, and Stanleytown came up as a sort of comparison, and the Judge reckoned he wouldn't have any Stanleytown in the Cariboo if he could help it."

"Then he'd better catch that Michael Trupp," said Mary briskly.

This was so sudden that Mrs. Bowers, caught off guard, felt her pulse jump; she dared not look at Lemuel, but was aware that the cup in his hand remained poised for a moment before he laid it on the table. Nothing more than this.

"He'll be caught before long, miss; you can count on it."

"Well, it's pretty bad to have a murderer going round

able to rob and kill just when it suits him. Mr. Flint, is it true the police don't know what the man is like—wouldn't know him if they saw him?"

"Quite a conundrum, ain't it?" Lemuel stole a glance at Ma to steady her nerves, "and of course it's been mighty difficult for Sergeant Lindsay with all the strangers moving in and out. But he'll be trapped before too long. You—you can reckon on that."

"Well, I hope so, but it's funny that big reward doesn't do anything. Surely somebody knows what he's like."

"That's right, miss, somebody must know, which is why I figure his course is pretty near run."

"Johnny thinks he's been in Richfield, perhaps at the hotel. Why, Mr. Flint, you may have—"

Lemuel, fortified by past experience, rose to hitherto unreachd heights of art: he gave a laugh; it sounded odd for he laughed but seldom:—

"Played cards with him? Maybe I have. Kind of interesting, if you come to think of it. Here's the tea, ma'am; hope it isn't too strong. Sugar?"

"No thanks." Mrs. Bowers, moistening her lips, spoke in a small voice, "I like it just as it comes."

"Sorry I'm right out of canned milk, but if I'd only known—sugar in yours, miss?—not that you need it."

The smile she gave him sent a quick warmth through Lemuel's veins; he felt more content than in many a day past.

"Here's some English biscuits—present from Mr. Dexter—same as you had at your party."

"They're good too. Quite a nice view you've got from here; I never noticed it before."

"Yes, miss, and Cow Mountain stands right up, don't it, especially with them lodgepole pine round the top, but Mr. Lennard tells me there'll be mighty few left next fall with all the timbering and charcoal that's needed. This section is going to look pretty bare."

"That's so," nodded Mrs. Bowers, "and the Judge he predicated there'll be round ten thousand men in the Cariboo by next June, mostly us Americans. I guess this place will have to join the USA—that's what Dan thinks. Seems natural too."

"No, ma'am, I reckon not: the USA cut loose from the old country because we figured we weren't getting a fair show, but that don't hold in the Cariboo, certainly not so long as the Judge is round here. What do you feel, miss?"

"I don't feel anything at all, Mr. Flint. How's the book getting on?"

Lemuel made a gesture that might have meant anything.

"Just so-so: I've made a few false starts; maybe one's liable to that when starting a new trade, but I have hopes once she's moving. Remember what the poet, Mr. O. Goldsmith, said about hopes?"

"I never read it."

"Hope, like the gleaming taper's light,
Adorns and cheers our way,
And still as darker grows the night
Emits a brighter ray."

he repeated quietly, "I kind of like that."

"It certainly sounds consoling," agreed Ma, "what did you say was your subject?"

"That, ma'am, is sort of difficult—there's so many subjects. It takes thinking. I might write about the poets, which'd be taking a kind of liberty on my part, or it might be just my observations and reflections, which the same I'm given too. Always was. I could write about things and folks I've come across. OBSERVATIONS AND REFLECTIONS OF L. FLINT! How'd that look in print."

"Just fine. Would the Cariboo be in it—and us?"

"Why it wouldn't make any sort of story without the Bowers—that is if you don't take offence."

"Mr. Flint, we'd be just tickled to death, wouldn't we, daughter?"

Mary smiled, nodded, didn't speak, being busy with her secret thoughts; there was something about this visit that turned her mind to unaccustomed channels, and she welcomed it. She pictured herself in a book, or watching a man writing a book, because a book, though it might have a lot to do with life, was at the same time something outside of and beyond that, and of intrinsic significance. It was inviting, and the kind of man who could write a book an unusual person in more ways than one. Harry had never talked about books, and she often wondered why, with him so well educated.

Mrs. Bowers, too, was busy with secret thoughts. They were diverse, contradicting each other. How much would Lemuel put into his book of 'observations'? The whole truth, or just part of it? Would it be a real, honest-to-God book if you left a lot out? Yet she didn't see how he could put everything in, considering the life he had led up till a few months ago. Right now he was playing a different part, playing it mighty well. Could he put that in? He with herself shared a grim secret, a problem he had sworn to solve. This would make a good active story if rightly handled, but how could one do this and at the same time protect the girl they both loved—for now she saw that he did indeed love Mary, and certainly from Mary's expression she was getting interested in Mr. Lemuel Flint. Thus assailed by one private problem after another, Ma decided there was but one thing to do. Wait!

And Lemuel? His secret thoughts were the hardest of all to sort out. Principally he was conscious that instead of uncomfortable preoccupation over his past life, he now dared with some hope to contemplate one quite different. This began to seem just possible. It could only be realised by bringing about the death of Michael Trupp in such fashion that none but himself and Mrs. Bowers would know

that the bandit and this girl's father were the same man. What this might cost himself he could not tell—perhaps his own life—and Mary would marry and be happy, but that, after all, was what he wanted. So he did not flinch, only realised that now he was sitting in a game that surpassed anything before imagined and called for all he could put into it. In previous games he could usually predict the outcome—but not now. And of this nothing showed on the surface.

It was Ma who broke the silence.

"Well, Mr. Flint, we've got to get back before dark. Your turn next time; we'll be expecting you."

"That's right," said Mary, then, of a sudden, "isn't there something I can do for you? What shall it be?"

"She means that, Mr. Flint."

Lemuel, shaken, looked at the mud floor: this was easier.

"Why, Miss Mary, I—I—no, there isn't a thing—not a thing; your coming here like this means more than I can tell you."

That was true, and when they had gone he sat for some time eyes fixed on the slope of Cow Mountain across which night began to trail her dusky skirts.

Then he lit the lamp, opened a drawer, took out his copy-book. It was blank.

Now he began to write, slowly, painfully, holding the pencil vertical, this being the only way he could write as yet. At the bottom of the page he signed his name, with the date.

Next he lifted a tin box from under the bunk, took from it a packet of bills. These he folded in the sheet torn from the copybook, wrapping all in a small parcel that he tied firmly with much knotted string, and wetting the pencil, wrote again on the outside:—

To Judge Begbie of Richfield in the Cariboo. Please open only after I am dead.

LEMUEL FLINT.

V On the Making of Roads

IT TAKES several kinds of people to make a country:—
First, the restless folk who can't stay put; they want to start out, it doesn't much matter where, but somewhere, almost always west or north; it may be the sheriff is after them, or for some other reason they themselves don't understand—they just don't care so long as they do start. They seldom leave any trail or tracks to speak of, perhaps a few blazes here and there in timber land, or black patches from camp fires, or a tin kettle with a hole in it—but not much more. Anyway they get somewhere, that's the main thing. They are just born rovers, feet shod with quicksilver. These are the trail seekers.

Later someone hears of something good, it may be out west, and more people start: these do leave a sort of path you can follow; here and there a big tree felled across a creek, or a blaze with pencilled information for the next comer, or a cleft stick with a note 'good water one half-mile north', or a hewn cross with name and date, or something like that. Often they change their minds, taking a fancy to some spot on the way, and hunt and trap and make friends with the natives if there are any. In winter they live in thick bush in hunting lodges, in summer on a lake or stream where the flies aren't too bad. These are the trail makers.

The third lot is again different; it moves slowly, turning paths into dirt roads, opening short cuts; it builds trading posts and log bridges and timber landings for boats and canoes on the waterways; it blasts big boulders, burns

stumps, and doesn't want to get anywhere in particular itself, but wants the road to get there. These are the roads makers.

The next still again different, mostly older, some quite old, not so interested in gold as to find good soil instead of the worn out land at home: they bring families and all you can get into a wagon, and all beasts that can walk behind a wagon, and a dog. When you bring a dog it means something. Crossing new unbroken land for the first time, they travel slowly, halting now and then to turn over the soil, squeeze a fistful, crumble and smell it, looking this way and that for water and drainage and grazing, timber for fuel and building and fencing.

At last when the right place is found, and before he does anything else, the man will unload his plough, and hitch up a pair of horses or oxen to turn the first furrow and see how the land feels against the share, while his women and children stand by, saying nothing, but somehow sure that something wonderful is going on. They are quite right in this, for when a man first drives the point of a plough into new soil in a new country he is doing something wonderful, and hitching himself to what is deep, precious and eternal, for this is what finally shapes a country, and will endure long after the last prospector has washed the last ounce of gold from the last creek in the district. These are the home makers.

And all these people are necessary to each other.

After a storm when thunder is cushioning off in softening pulsations, you'll sometimes see a great skyward congregation of solid looking clouds with ravines opening into each other, with gorges, cliffs and canyons piled in immeasurable heaps, all so huge and imponderable that it does not seem possible they are only vapour. You find overhanging ledges just about to topple, ranges and peaks incredibly assembled, and just as often you'll discover somewhere a jagged cleft that finds its way through the upheaval, a kind

of twisting funnel, and at the end of it a glint of golden sunlight.

It was something like that where the Royal Engineers from England were blasting the new Cariboo Road through the Fraser Canyon towards its golden goal, and on it the hopes of thousands were set.

Between the old trail and the new Road was this difference. When Cataline and Barnard and Jim Hawkins and Frank Laumeister with the Shah of Persia and Queen of Sheba came along, Nature said to them, "Here, you can pass this way and no other," so they did pass that way because there was no other; but these men, the Engineers, brought the Road with them; having it in their eyes and instruments and kegs of black powder.

In places they'd just widen the trail, it being in the right spot; at others they'd stop, jam an eye to an instrument, and say "Here, this won't do." Then you'd see groups of three arrange themselves on the shoulder of a big knob, or high on a ledge where a man would anchor himself by a rope round the waist to a stump or sharp boulder: these would start drilling; you'd hear the music of hammers on jumping steel, see water poured into the deepening hole before it was swabbed out with a green stick broomed at the end, and grey sludge knocked off with a spatter.

When the hole is deep enough along comes the powder man on his special business; he measures the depth, takes a look round to see how much powder is needed to lift so much rock, then pours in the black stuff. He cuts the right length of fuse, pushes one end into a percussion cap, crimps the edges of the cap between his teeth so it will hold; you have to know about this for if you bite too near the explosive end it will lift off the top of your head. Then he puts in the fuse with a little more powder, tamping the hole tight with sand or earth. When that is all done, he lights the fuse, shouts "F I R E — F I R E" and gets behind something solid.

In about a minute there comes a dull knock like someone hitting under the table with his knee—you'd feel it under your feet—then a crack or roar and maybe a hundred tons of granodiorite two million years old lifts right out of Nicaragua Rock or Jackass Hill, smashing down into the tawny Fraser; men stare overhead watching for fragments that might spin their way, while the boom echoes softer and softer along the canyon till it dies in the far distance just like thunder.

That would be another very small bit of the new Cariboo Road.

It was most dangerous when the strengthening sun and warm airs from the Pacific struck the high slopes; then the glaciers shed their great resplendent tears, mountain torrents swelled; on many a precipice known only to the bald-headed eagle and wild goat, deep snowfields and acres of loose rock lost their grip; they shuddered, stirred and moved. Like vast flakes of the earth's skin they moved downward with a blast that levelled tall trees they did not touch, while their passage entombed all that stood in front. You could see on the mountains the rights of way cut by glaciers in ages past, ragged scars on the earth's skin that would never heal.

North of Buonaparte Creek where the trail ran through green timber, on to the Quesnel, on towards Jack of Clubs Lake the Road was pushed. Trees toppled on a two hundred mile stretch. Oxen, straining at steel chains, dragged out stumps like giant teeth to be piled in pyramids, brandishing long, brown roots like stiffened octopi; you'd see the forest open up for a mile—two miles—perhaps three if the Road struck level ground. The forest retreated from the new Road, and at night a cordon of fire held it back.

Again it was a human caterpillar, but this one did not travel steadily, it would pause here and there for a few weeks, then move on. It quivered; it had steel mandibles, picks, shovels, axes, bars, hammers, powder. With these it

Cariboo Road

grubbed, nibbled, gnawed and bored. It slaved and sweated, laughéd and cursed. Little breathing human atoms of it perished by fire or frost or blast, but that made no difference. The caterpillar produced more atoms. Under its mordant attack you'd see fresh wounds appear in the granitic ribs of earth, new slashes in its green cloak, and if you joined all these up in one long curving line you'd find they reached from Yale to Williams Creek.

That was the making of the new Road.



16

Spring Comes to the Cariboo

SPRING came to the Cariboo like a smiling gaoler with jangling keys.

There were truculent pauses when retreating winter snarled back, bared her glistening teeth and sheathed the wilderness in ice, but these rebellions gradually softened to a comfortless transition with snow and water choking the tangled gulches, the earth lying naked and sodden. A little later began the return passage of millions of strong-winged birds; the black bear blinked from his long sleep to lounge in the sun, the grizzly lumbered towards plateaus where he would summer. Far and wide spread a cosmic languor, around the cabins of Richfield and Barkerville showed heaps of refuse, men left the door open at noon; from the Little Canyon sounded a roar where Williams Creek raced in freedom till again it was prisoned in the flumes of the Argonauts.

Ma came through the winter pretty well, though at the end of it she felt stiff, almost crusted: it was all right to be close up to your own like that, to do your best for them, but this was soon done—and then what? She'd feel all set for a lot more, but there wouldn't be anything. She missed things she'd once had—just things—things she'd wiped and dusted and rearranged for years; they hadn't any real value or beauty, were of no practical use, but they'd done a lot to make home look like home instead of a stopping place where people were all packed up to go elsewhere: they made a sort of fringe to life, and here on Williams Creek a few things stuck round the cabin would have been mighty human, but Ma's were all in a box in a shed on Telegraph Hill where Molly had promised to look after them.

Lemuel had occupied another shack, leaving Marta's as nice as would any housewife: the hard mud floor was dustless as cement, window panes polished, blankets aired and folded, clean pillow slips—Mary had washed them—tea in the cannister, sugar in the jar, a small stock in the cupboard, enough stove wood—this with Dan's help—beside the door for months.

On the table a note under the kettle, quite legible though the letters looked stiff. In the note a fifty dollar bill. Marta's eyes grew misty as she read it with the Kangaroo at her shoulder.

"Dear Miss Marta and Miss Lena,

I'm certainly obliged for your kindness and hope you find things as you like them. As the poet, Mr. W. Shakespeare said,

'Kindness in women, not their beauteous looks, shall win my love.'

Yours to command,

Lemuel Flint."

"That poor old pilgrim!" she said, "who'd have thought it?"

"I wonder how he made out—never can tell, can you. Gosh! this shack looks clean, and isn't that a dandy letter? He's certainly stuck on you, Marta."

Marta gulped, shook her fair head. She was ready to work for Lemuel all the rest of her days. He had something she hadn't. She wanted that. She was longing to give him comfort, to keep him just as he was, courtly, decorative, different from other men. She was only thirty, and made for love, tired of being thrown round by an ever-changing procession of roystering strangers at fifty cents for three minutes; tired of drinking cold tea, pretending to like it. She wanted the love of one man, one only, and for this would give the tribute of her loyal soul and strong white body. And she was not afraid.

"I wish he was, Lena, but there's not a chance."

"Aw, come on!"

"Not a chance. Those nights when he sat here reading to poor Mr. Donald sometimes he'd stop and look over at me, but he wasn't thinking of me—not a little bit—I could see that. I wonder what he's doing now being short on his own trade."

Lemuel had already settled that, and stood behind Parsons' counter, such a salesman as the Cariboo had not known before. The new store stood in Barkerville, the new town that was taking shape on Lower Williams with the new hospital and Jenny's new hotel. Canadian Creek, Lowhee and other areas were tributary to Richfield, but the real mint had opened on Lower Williams.

You can imagine Lemuel behind that counter, dressed with all his usual care, welcoming the old timers as they got back from outside. They all knew him, were all glad to see him, and many wanted a look at his hand, which now showed only a pinkish scar, and he was able to weigh gold dust as well as Scotch Jenny or Parsons or the clerk who bought for the bank down at Yale. When doing this, he'd likely drop a quotation or two such as, "*'all that glitters is not gold,'*" as the poet, Mr. Jack Dryden said, but the house is willing to take a chance on this lot!"

When friends asked how he'd got through the winter, he'd say—"fine—just fine—being mostly occupied in compiling a book," which, though he'd not written a word, only heightened the interest they took in him, for of course the book would be about the Cariboo. Now and again a man would linger, then say in a casual way that some night he'd drop in on Lemuel and give him a lot of inside information not to be had elsewhere, and if it would help to mention his name in the book that would be all right too.

The store was full the first time the Judge came in—that was the day after he arrived—and at once he saw the change in Lemuel and went over to shake hands. He didn't

need telling that Lemuel was all through with his bad patch, and set to make good.

"Well, Mr. Flint, I can see how you stood the winter. How do you like a mercantile occupation?"

Lemuel, appreciating this public recognition, gave quite a smile with one of his courtly little bows:—

"Well, Judge, it's good to see you back, and I'm certainly getting interested in commerce—it's quite an education—" then, because he never apologised for his former trade, "it ain't so high pitched as what I followed before, but I'm liable to stay with it longer, and the boys are surely good to me, all of 'em."

"I'm glad to hear it."

"Yes, sir, that's a fact: what's more I find quite a lot of romance in commerce, specially with an emporium stocked like this one."

"It has—er—its poetical side?" suggested the Judge with a twinkle.

"Why certainly: remember what the poet, Mr. O. Goldsmith, said about commerce?"

"Let me see—brought in wealth and freedom, didn't it?"

"Yes, sir, like this—

'When wealth and freedom reign contentment fails,
And honour sinks where commerce long prevails'

That's what he wrote, but I don't hold with it."

"Oh, why?"

"Honour don't sink round here at all; it's a straight cash price for straight goods. I guess Mr. Goldsmith never saw a store like this, or he wouldn't have wrote that."

The Judge laughed, so did Jack Parsons who had been listening, and it made Lemuel even more solid with Jack than he'd been before. He was very quick at figures, could add up a double line like lightning without a mistake, so after the store closed, Jack, who liked to know every day just how he stood, got to bed in no time instead of sitting

up for hours figuring cash and nuggets. And if anything was overstocked or a poor seller you could leave that to Lemuel.

To-day a lot of men wanted a word with the Judge, then just as he was going someone asked if anything recent had been heard of Michael Trupp.

"No, nothing; I imagine he's spent the winter south of the border, but no doubt we'll hear from him soon. The reward still holds."

When he said this his eyes turned to Lemuel for an instant as though inviting comment, then he went on raising his voice so that all might hear:—

"That reminds me to urge you men not to try and take out gold of your own; it's too risky."

"A shilling an ounce is a lot to pay," objected Jack. "Can't the Government do it any cheaper?"

"I had that up with Governor Douglas last winter, and we went into the figures, and found that as the matter stands the hire of men and horses and their feed costs more than the escort earns even at the shilling an ounce, so I'm advising it be discontinued. Barnard's Express is safe and cheaper."

"When's the Road coming through, Judge?"

"In early fall if all goes well: bull-teams instead of ponies for freighting and the stage. That'll be a great day for the Cariboo. Well, good luck, boys. Mr. Flint, I'll drop in at your place some evening for a chat, perhaps next Sunday if it's fine, and Sergeant Lindsay gives me time off."

"Good day, Judge, good day, sir, glad to have you back." It came in a chorus, then there was a lot of talk about the escort because it was reckoned that five millions would be sent out before the freeze-up, and at sixteen dollars an ounce that meant just about 13 solid tons of gold.

Later, the Judge took a turn round by the Bowers' cabin, found Ma alone, and thought her looking rather drawn. But she brightened at sight of him.

"It seems more'n seven months since you were here, Judge."

"Yes, I expect so. How did the winter go?"

"About as you told me; the only real high spot was Mr. Cameron's discovery, and that didn't seem quite real for a while; then there was the way Sophy went out on that toboggan."

"Yes, I know; I happened to be in Yale when Cameron arrived."

"It's pretty real now that I look back at it, specially with all that's doing on Lower Williams."

"Which in turn means longer life to the Cariboo. How's your husband and Mary?"

"Dan's just his old self, an' back on the Jacket. There's nothing there, I know it, but I'm scared to come out with it. Judge, we can stick it out maybe a couple of months more, then what am I going to do? Walk out to Yale?"

"I've been thinking about that," said he. "Did you happen to notice the country you came through down round about the two hundred mile post?"

"That's north from the Buonaparte Creek?"

"Yes."

"No, I guess not: I got so sore sitting on that darn mule I missed most of the scenery this side of the Fraser Canyon. I couldn't miss that."

"No," he laughed, "you couldn't. Well, the district I speak of strikes me as well suited to grazing, and the winters aren't bad enough for cattle to need shelter. It's a different climate from this. To-day cattle are being driven up hundreds of miles from Oregon, and you know what they're like when they reach here."

"I certainly do." Ma's eyes sharpened with quick intelligence. "You're thinking that—?"

"I'll put it this way. Our local population has reached its peak. Williams and the rest of the creeks will be gutted within the next few years—that's certain—but there'll be

other discoveries later on, probably more permanent ones. Also there'll be the Road. In addition the wealth of this northern land is not confined to gold, and there'll always be need of good meat and a good price paid for it, so the district I speak of should afford a fine opening to a man who likes an open-air life and is not afraid of work."

"Go right on, Judge."

"That's all for the present," he smiled, "except that the Government would be quite ready to assist settlers of—er—the Bowers type to start cattle raising in the Cariboo."

"So when the bottom drops out of the Jacket, I'm to—?"

"I notice you say 'when' not 'if.'"

"And I mean it, but only to you, Judge."

"Then you might keep what I've said in mind; British Columbia needs people like the Bowers to make it their home. Meantime, don't take things too hard. What about Mary and young Harper?"

"Nothing doing, leastways that's what I tell myself, while next day I don't rightly know. I've an idea she's getting interested in Mr. Flint. Something's happened to that man. Seen him yet?"

"We've just had a chat; I agree, something has happened, and I'm glad of it."

"Y'know," she continued thoughtfully, "it's as if that hole in his hand let something out of him an' something else in. He's the same to talk to, but when you size him up he ain't the same. Now you know where you are. Last year he made me feel kind of flattered when he came round; this year I ain't so much flattered but a sight more satisfied."

"Which is exactly how it strikes me," laughed Begbie, "and I've an idea we'll hear more of Mr. Lemuel Flint."

Ma nodded, then because in these uncertain days her thoughts were mostly of Mary and Mary's future, she sent the Judge one of her straight looks.

"Hear anything more of that Michael Trupp when you were outside?"

Begbie, not missing the significance of this, shook his head.

"No, Mrs. Bowers, but I've been warning the boys not to attempt taking out gold themselves unless well protected. That's all Mr. Trupp is waiting for."

"Do you suppose that's his name—really?"

She blurted this out with a sort of explosive directness as though it were no longer to be suppressed, and it was imperative to know what he thought about it.

"Do you?" he asked quietly.

"I—I guess not—'tain't likely is it?"

"Most unlikely—of that we'll probably know more before long. Meantime," he added, "don't worry, and you might sound your husband's reactions to cattle raising—just in case. By the way, has Mr. Flint said much about the Red Jacket since he put his money into it?"

"No, sir, not a peep out of him; he's never mentioned it to me. I've often wondered why."

Begbie felt pretty sure he knew why, but said nothing of that, and passed on to encounter Doc Flattery who had been looking over the new hospital at Barkerville and was well pleased with what he found, so they sat for a moment looking down at the turmoil all around them.

"American citizens, most of 'em," ruminated the Judge, and so they will remain. No British requirement to the contrary. British miner's license—British title to a claim—yes—but nothing more. What's going to come of all this, Flattery?"

"Dunno—I've often wondered."

"Sort of human kaleidoscope, isn't it? Some of 'em overland from Canada—did you hear of those Welshmen who turned up the other day? Footed it, Flattery, across a continent, and reached here half dead! There's guts for you: others round the Horn in four-masters, or across the Isthmus at Tehuantepec where they waited and scorched and starved, many for months, then northward in anything that

would carry them and still float, all bound for the Cariboo, but not nearly enough to outbalance the American majority."

"You anticipate some sort of union between this colony and the States?"

"I put that straight to the Governor last winter; he's afraid of it. Had it up with the Colonial Secretary in Whitehall, but no result. They're not interested—we're too far off. Told him they were building the Road for us, but that's as far as they'll go."

"No help from Canada either, eh?"

"I doubt it; the mountains are too high, and too many of them."

"It's a curious situation too with the Russians in Alaska."

"I doubt if that will last long. The Americans want to control the whole western coast of this continent, Mexico to the Bering Straits. That's natural enough. Also they've more imagination than Whitehall."

"Judge, do you suppose that one hundred years from now Canada and the States will be two separate nations? It looks odd on the map. Same language, same forebears, same kind of country to break in."

"Flattery, who can tell? I hope with all my heart that British Columbia will stay British, which depends on how important we seem to Canada. There's the only answer, and there's the family to which we really belong. By the way, a last year patient of yours seems to have had a rebirth—Flint, the gambler. Seen him yet?"

"No, but I understand he bought in with Bowers on the Red Jacket. I passed that claim a while ago, but nothing doing that I could see."

Flattery was wrong there. Dan, with Johnny, had gone over to the Dutch Bill a hundred yards away to talk with Deitz who had a theory about gold creeks and the way things happened.

"It's like this," he was saying, "you take any creek in a

country like this, and I'll bet it don't look the same to-day as it did a hundred years ago."

"Why not?" asked Dan.

"'Cause every creek shifts from one bed to another: say a slide will come down on the south and shove it over—then another on the north will shove it back but not to the same place. I seen that on the American River myself. A creek can have a hell of a lot of beds one after another, but where it settles down for maybe a few hundred years, why that's where the gold lodges."

"You reckon it's that way on Lowhee."

"No, I don't—that's a ravine in solid rock; the creek couldn't shift sideways, it stuck to the old channel."

"What about Lower Williams?" asked Dan.

"No ravine down there—just a wide flat valley. I guess the old creek wandered about where it had a mind to."

"But Billy Barker struck it."

"Sure he did—lucky strike too when you hit a strip maybe forty feet wide at the bottom of a river of gravel I guess six hundred feet wide."

"Where did the gold come from anyway?"

"A motherlode of quartz, sure as you're born. Some fellow'll get on to that some day. It'll be turning out the stuff when there'll be nothing on Williams but a few mink."

Mr. Knott shook his head. "Where'd you get all your information anyway, Bill?"

"Sort of worked it out myself," said Mr. Deitz modestly.

"What happens supposing one of them earthquakes comes along?"

Mr. Deitz pondered a moment. "I believe there's gold right up on these hills where old creek beds was hoisted maybe when the quakes did come along a million years ago or less."

"Nobody found a colour up on a hillside yet. Kind of optimistic ain't you?"

"Well, if I didn't feel that way I wouldn't be here now, Johnny. Same with you. Same with all of us."

"Yes, I guess so."

"Hearing you fellows talk," put in Dan, "I'm wondering what this country looked like a million years ago."

"Certainly 'tweren't any tougher than it is right now," cackled Mr. Knott, "an' I'll bet the Red Jacket ain't changed a fraction."

With that he went off. Deitz returned to the Dutch Bill where the sluicboxes were a picture, and Dan got to shovelling gravel out of a six-foot pit. He felt better—more hopeful. When you can't see the thing you want to believe in, and, by God, you've got to believe in or crack, it's hard to maintain your faith: it's like a phantom existing only in imagination, but if you dig in it—feel it under your feet—that's different. So now Dan would work a while, try a panful, get nothing, look over at the Cunningham or Dutch Bill, and say, "what in hell am I worrying about?"

Often after he was asleep and Ma couldn't settle down, she'd get up without waking Mary, lay a few sticks on the fire without a sound, and sit in the big rocker, hands folded, thinking, thinking, trying to figure out where they were heading. Later, much later in life, it wasn't the high spots that came back to her most readily but those silent interludes when she was alone like this hearing only Dan's regular breathing, the putter of the fire, and maybe the long-drawn howl of a gray wolf as he looked down from Cow Mountain on the slumbering camp.

17

The Cunningham Robbery

WHEN Cameron struck rich pay on Lower Williams in midwinter, and the news got out to the coast, it was like an electric shock, and when the spring rush hit the Cariboo, Ma, now an old timer, would stand at her door and watch it flow by. She knew all about it, knew just how it felt, also she'd wintered inside which gave one a reputation that was not affected by the fact that you'd been too broke to get out. The newcomers would glance at her respectfully and pass on, God only knew where. There was no room under any roof in Richfield or Barkerville, so they'd hang round for a few days, then spill over north, east and west hunting for new creeks.

There were schoolmasters and plumbers and barkeepers and lawyers, all kinds of white men you could think of, with plenty of Chinese, and all except the Orientals had the hungry, mesmerised look Ma knew so well. A bunch would stop opposite, say, the Wake up Jake, inspect the sluiceboxes, stare at each other dumbly, come to themselves with a jerk, then hustle off with no notion of where they were heading. Nor did it matter where they headed so long as they arrived first, so friendships made on the trail were broken, men grew secretive, suspicious, they'd mislead each other about where they were going, and about the only ones who stuck to the truth were those for whom the loaded rifles spoke louder than words.

The Chinese were different, not anxious or excited; they'd make money where a white man starved, catching flour gold that an Argonaut who lacked a pigtail couldn't

capture. They'd nothing to worry about, and knew it, so you never saw a Chink down and out.

That summer the Cariboo strode on to its peak. The new Road was nearly through from Quesnel where a stage coach was ready waiting, having reached this far on a damned barge from Alexandria, forty miles down the Fraser. In front of its body and beneath the driver was a big leather boot. At the bottom of the boot, anchored to the floor, a strong box of boilerplate, double padlocked that would give Michael Trupp something to think about. Frank Barnard's best horses were bulging with oats.

On Williams Creek the canvas city that had folded its wings at the approach of winter now doubled in size. Spreading like a bursting wave, its multitudinous tents were star-scattered where an international army more than half American, lay picketted. There were more dance halls, more Hurdies, a plethora of rasping fiddles. The clink of glass sounded till daybreak while the heroes, the lucky ones, dumped their pokes with full knowledge that the morrow would replenish the golden store. These were the hosts of the Cariboo. While a man might go hungry, he need not lack a drink. These were graduates of the north who, over the naked crown of Bald Mountain—

“first met the sun's bravado
and saw below them, fold on fold
grey to pearl and pearl to gold,
Cariboo like a land of old—
the land of Eldorado.”

By sweat and faith they had unearthed the glutted gravel. Kings of the earth, they walked on air. Under their eyes the yellow harvest thickened in hypnotic beds. At night-fall they stuffed it in sacks under pole bunks in mud-floored cabins. At sunrise, taking no chances, burdened with increase of treasure, they carted it back to dozens of shaft-houses till it went out by guarded packtrain to Yale and

Victoria. But of thousands of claims, only a few paid well.

By all this Lemuel seemed untouched: embarked on a new life that grew increasingly attractive, he discovered that he had friends, real friends, and if sometimes there fell across his path the ominous shadow of a man with sloping shoulders, he did not allow this to ruffle his outward calm. He stuck to business, made social calls now and then on the Bowers and Scotch Jenny—who harboured secret thoughts of marrying him after the freeze-up—and saved his money.

Particularly he appreciated the attitude of the Judge, and spent many an hour trying to imagine some way in which he could atone for his deception of that kindly official, but, ferret about as he might, every loophole seemed closed. He was a liar. He was obstructing the process of law and justice. His silence was exposing innocent men to danger and possible death. But the only alternative was Mary's father at the end of a rope, and that he could not contemplate.

At the week-end the weather broke; on Sunday morning black skies overhung the Cariboo. At noon they opened. Within the hour Williams and a dozen other creeks were racing. Burdened flumes spilled their surplus. Shafts were flooded. At nightfall the downpour stopped, but not a star was visible, Richfield as dark as a pit.

Round ten o'clock Lemuel was putting aside the cups and saucers he had set out in case the Judge did turn up when the door opened, and there stood James Hollis!

Lemuel couldn't stir: a cup hung in midair while the grey eyes held the dark ones, and the atmosphere seemed to sing.

"Flint," sounded the cold voice, "you've changed quite a lot."

That to start with. He stepped in, closing the door. No mask this time, but the sagging right pocket had a bulge, and he kept staring as though interested in the change.

Lemuel said nothing: he knew that the hour of judgment had come, and he'd meet it as best he could, but his gun was in the bureau drawer, and might have been miles away.

Now Hollis gave a shrug, came forward, took the chair meant for the Judge. His eyes never relaxed their stony gaze.

"I guess there'll be no interruption this time."

Lemuel nodded: being alone in the world with this man, he could do nothing else.

"I've been sizing things up. Our last arrangement stands unless you've got something better."

Lemuel hadn't anything at all, only the former queer sensation of standing on top of a hill watching a distant train rush to destruction. Now he felt no impulse to stop it.

"When?" he breathed.

Trupp sat very still, so still that he resembled a mechanism rather than a man. Not a sound outside except a hiss of water from Upper Williams. Listening for a moment, he gave a nod.

"I've been waiting for this: so have you, but you didn't know it. How's that hand of yours—any good?"

Automatically, Lemuel put out his arm.

"Not so bad. Met the Judge since he came in?"

"Yes."

"Well?"

"Well—nothing."

"Didn't mention Jim Hollis of Sacramento, did he?"

"He did, not to me. He's waiting for you."

"Suits me." The smile that accompanied this was not good to see. "Anything strike you about to-night?"

"Quite a lot—since you came." Lemuel was playing for time.

"Dexter's having a party at the new hotel. He's out to beat Barker's last fall. It's free to all. You and I can go if we like, but we don't like. Most of the town is drunk already—see?"

"What of it?"

"Your brain don't work like it used to," the voice was chill with irony, "so take the Cunningham—I was on that claim today, the best on Upper Williams just as you said. They told me—told Jim Hollis—they'd clean up to-morrow after the party. To-night Tom Watson's on guard. That's how I got news, Flint, with a lot of money on my head. Maybe you thought of that reward pretty often last winter?"

Lemuel hated this man from the bottom of his soul, but he was in the grip of mortal fear, and his will bent like a reed in the wind.

"Maybe I did. Who wouldn't?"

"It's too late now. We'll get busy."

With this he slid from his sleeve a fifteen inch bar of drill steel, pointed at one end, chisel-shaped at the other. From his pocket two small canvas sacks, a length of stout cord and a gag.

"This storm won't last. Come on!"

Two hundred yards down a flattish slope to the bank of Upper Williams with trailing mist shrouding the lights of Richfield so that in the midst of thousands the two seemed utterly alone. Listening like a questing hound, Hollis paused at intervals, and they were halfway over the creek when he said:—

"You wait here—keep your eye skinned—whistle if you're spotted. This won't take long."

Instantly he was lost, engulfed. Now, if ever, was Lemuel's moment and his mind darted about. He saw Hollis captured, tried, hung. He saw himself redeemed, and—? But he couldn't do it—the cost to another was too heavy; better face whatever might now await him, and perhaps in the course of that he could find another way out, but he simply could not remain here, so moved on till the shafthouse loomed up. His bones had turned to water, but, crawling closer, he put his eye to a crack.

Inside burned a candle; near it sat a man, his back to

The Cunningham Robbery

a pile of sacking, eyes closed, a pipe sagging from his slack jaw. The single point of light left the rest of the shelter in deep shadow, and Trupp was not visible. No sound here but the chuckle of water racing through the main flume nearby. Its flow had been cut off the Cunningham, but the gate leaked, and some still reached the long sloping sluicibox with its heavy cover.

Then it was as though part of the shadow became solid where something moved: it took shape like an enormous dog crouching warily till of a sudden it straightened. Lemuel saw the bar lift and fall. He heard nothing when Watson crumpled over on his side.

Gagging and binding took but a moment. Watson lay inert as Trupp turned to the sluicibox. Came a squeak of ruptured metal and yielding screws, the crack of splintered wood. As the cover fell back, he held the candle close.

The magic stuff was jammed in beds against the shallow riffles, deepest at the upper side. A film of water slid over it like transparent glaze. Lemuel lay fascinated, watching Trupp scooping up nuggets, careless of the fine dust that ran through his fingers. In five minutes the thing was done. Then he tied the throats of two sacks that weighed thirty pounds each, and stepped out.

"Here's yours." He handed one to Lemuel, slung the other on the bar over his shoulder.

Following as in a dream, Lemuel's lips felt cracked: he wasn't thinking about the gold, or Trupp, or what he would do when he got away; all he felt was a sense of damnation. He wasn't even what he had been a few moments ago, though that was bad enough. Now something was planted in him that he'd carry about for the rest of his life. It was fear! Fear would attack him through innocent eyes by day, glower at him in the dark. Never again could he be quite alone.

The way back seemed longer, rougher, the lights of Richfield nearer. Trupp would halt, listen, signal, move

on. Once he dragged Lemuel violently to earth a second before three men passed within hailing distance, but, still unseen, they gained the south bank where he paused and stared about. Here he was quite calm, and somehow more of a companion. Nothing of the killer about him now.

"Good enough," he whispered, standing close, "shows what you can do when you know how. There's six thousand in your sack, so take care of it. I'm off. Next time something different, with longer notice. I'll think it out."

Lemuel shivered. He mustn't be abandoned like this by one who was now his only refuge, his sole possible companion. With Trupp he'd be—something, be less fearful. Life had come to that.

"Where?" he asked thickly, "where to? I can't stay here—I'll crack."

"Crack!" Trupp sent him one lightning flicker of a glance, then looked almost amused. "Can't stick it alone, eh?"

"Not now—not after this. I'm—I'm not what I was."

"What more do you want, Flint?"

"To—to keep in touch. I'll talk if I don't. Where can I find you?"

"Asked that the last time too! Well, my home town is on Poorman's Creek—if that's any good—which it isn't."

In the same instant he dropped his sack, the bar passed in a flash from left hand to right, his arm swung up—down!

All Lemuel felt was a crushing impact on the crown of his head: all he heard was the roar of a great wind.

* * *

So it came that Tom Watson and Lemuel Flint staked the first claims in the new hospital, and next morning the Judge, with Doc Flattery, stood looking down at the unconscious ex-gambler wondering whether speech would return before the end, or must there die with him the secret that thousands of Argonauts were itching to solve.

All through the north men licked hairy lips over the Cunningham robbery. Twelve thousand clean gone, and only two battered hospital cases to show for it. The affair had the daring, contemptuous, efficient touch of Michael Trupp with no loose ends to it, and there remained just the off chance, slim enough under a cracked skull, that Flint might breathe one revealing whisper before life left him.

"Well," Begbie gazed at the bloodless face, "what's your opinion?"

"It's not worth much; there's a fractured area over a clot."

"How long might this condition last?"

"That's hard to say; hours—days—possibly even a week. There might be a momentary return to consciousness, but you can't bank on it while the clot is there."

Begbie looked grave. This business gave him a sense of futility; amongst regiments of adventurers in the Cariboo somewhere was Trupp, and—and—at this point his brain switched back to last September, to his visit with Lemuel in Marta's cabin, and the agile, sloping-shouldered stranger he found there. That all came back now, and the odd restraint of both men when he opened the door. Hollis, James Hollis of Sacramento! that was the name. And Hollis had apparently known Lemuel Flint elsewhere, though Begbie remembered being doubtful at the time. Then the talk that followed—while he felt his way about to get under the skin of something that didn't seem quite natural, after which he had edged in the matter of conscience, and Hollis said you either had one or you hadn't—there was nothing more to it.

"Flattery, do you know anything of a man called James Hollis, I'm told he comes from Sacramento? He was in Richfield last year?"

"It's a new name to me. Why?"

"I understand he and Flint had been friends outside."

"George at the post office might remember if he'd been there."

"I'll enquire. Any objection to my trying to get some kind of response here?"

"Try by all means, but that part of him has gone abroad."

"Flint?" the Judge bent over, pitching his voice low and very clear, "this is Judge Begbie. I want to ask you about Hollis—Jim Hollis of Sacramento—Flint, do you hear me?"

There was no stir: the large, dark, wide-open eyes were like pools in the shadow of a rock; Lemuel was too far away. He lived, but his life had nothing to do with that of anyone else, the secret was his—all his, and in those eyes Begbie could discern only himself, a microscopic Judge who looked back at him very earnest and anxious. Then the eyes turned to the ceiling, and appeared to be watching flies.

"You're right, Flattery, no use now, but if there's any change you'll let me know at once."

"I will, if I get the chance, but it'll come without warning. Have you questioned Watson yet?"

"I'll do so now."

Mr. Thomas Watson, who possessed a skull like a bullock, was sitting up, and grinned cheerfully at his visitor.

"Well, Tom, you look comfortable."

"Sure I am, Judge. This is certainly a fine place."

"It is; also you're getting out of it sooner than the man next door."

"They tell me he hasn't far to go, eh?"

"Not far. Now I'd like to ask you a few questions."

"Drive right on, Judge, but there isn't a darn thing I can tell you."

"Has anything recently passed between you and Flint?"

"No, sir, we ain't spoken—there weren't any suitable subject for conversation."

"You've had a lot of strangers inspecting the Cunningham lately?"

"Sure we have; a darn nuisance too."

"Has Flint been on the claim, or anything happened to make you at all suspicious?"

"No, Judge, he never came near us—not once. I'll bet on that. Course there's been a ring of tenderfeet three or four deep with their eyes sticking out."

"Now listen, Tom; this may sound a hopeless sort of question but did you ever notice amongst them a middle sized man with sloping shoulders and grey eyes—he'd be about forty, clean shaven, with a very set and determined sort of face?"

"No, Judge, can't say I did. What's in your mind?"

"I'm not sure myself yet. What did you lose last night?"

"The boys reckon round 700 ounces—they're kind of sore."

"Have you ever heard the name Hollis—James Hollis. Now try and remember."

Watson pulled down his black brows:—

"Seems I have somewhere. Oh! I know—'twas last fall—fellow was asking George at the post office for a letter, and say, he was built like you said, and gave that name. Pretty persistent too. There wasn't any letter, and George got riled and said if this pilgrim was so set on getting one, darned if he wouldn't write it himself. Now I come to think of it, that was the day you started the hospital subscription. I believe Hollis put something up with the rest of the boys, and you're liable to find the name on the list. This any good, Judge?"

"I think it may be; much obliged for the chat. For the present this is just between ourselves—please remember that."

"Sure I will."

"I'm told you'll be out in a few days."

"That's what the doc says. Flint hasn't a chance, eh?"

"I doubt it."

"Well, I'm certainly sorry for the poor old rooster. So long, sir, drop in any time you're passing."

Begbie went off in thoughtful mood to find Sergeant Lindsay waiting for him. There was little to report but, examining the subscription list, they found the name 'James Hollis' checked off as paid, though Hollis himself had not put pencil to paper. Then to clear his mind the Judge took a walk: men's eyes sharpened when they saw him, but to those who ventured to speak he only nodded, leaving conjecture in his wake.

Now when you've had your skull cracked and come round poorer by a lot of the real stuff; when you're one of the two first patients in the new hospital; when you've just been in private conclave with the chief magistrate of the district—all this brings a certain distinction so that Mr. Watson found himself a point of focal interest in the twin towns, and spent his waking hours in entertaining a procession of friends.

"Yes, sir," he'd say, touching the top of his skull in gingerly fashion, then looking gravely at the ring of visitors, "I was sitting there, thinking, smoking, wishing I was at the dance, listening to the storm. 'Lots of shafts flooded out' I said to myself, then of a sudden it 'was like an explosion right alongside me, and I didn't know a thing till a while later I found my head under the sluicibox. It leaked, so I guess that's what brought me round."

"I guess you were pretty bloody, eh?" someone always asked at this point.

"No, sir, no blood that you'd notice. When a man's skull's bust as bad as I was he just don't bleed. Doc says it's the same next door. Anyway I laid there wondering what hit me. There weren't no more thunder, so I reckoned I had some kind of a stroke till I saw the sluicibox cover hanging with the hinges broke. That roused me all right, so I felt round, and there wasn't a darn thing left except some fine stuff of no account. Then I felt kind of sick like the roof

of my head had gone adrift. I guess I fainted, and woke up right where I am now. Sorry, boys, but that's all there is to it, though some folks would cook up quite a story."

Then he would glance round, move his head very slightly as though even that was painful, and say:—

"I know what you're thinking, but I've promised to keep my trap shut about the rest of it: sorry, but that's straight—thanks, don't mind if I do—the doc says a cigar don't hurt any. What's that?—Flint—Sure, he's here too; keep quiet a minute—you'll hear him breathing the other side of the partition. 'There! Get that? No, sir, I've nothing against *him*—not a thing. Now I guess I'll rest a while. Thanks for coming round."

At this the visitors would tiptoe out, halting a moment at Lemuel's door to hear him breathe, while the next batch tiptoed in.

By midday some ten thousand men and about twenty women had heard the news, Ma Bowers amongst the latter. When Dan came in bursting with it she looked shocked, but to his surprise had nothing to say. Later however, and deeply troubled within herself, she felt that she must talk with someone, and went over to see Johnny.

The old man was in his open shed sandpapering a wooden tombstone on which the paint had dried a month ago. He gave it a final rub, drew two faint pencil lines against a straight-edge, and began to outline *Lemuel Flint*.

"Why, Johnny!" said she horrified, "Mr. Flint ain't dead yet!"

"No, ma'am, but he soon will be, and I'm kind of rushed. Interesting how things come round, eh?"

"I think it's terrible!"

"Maybe, to a woman, but the whole darn camp is tryin' to figure out what's in that pilgrim's busted head. Why, Mrs. Bowers, there ain't a soul in the Cariboo ever got the attention he's gettin' right now just on the chance something'll leak out before he hands in his checks."

"Yes, Johnny, that's what Dan tells me."

"Well, ain't it dramatic? Don't it discount them pomes he read us last winter? Can't you see him settin' there in the square-tailed coat tellin' us how the folk in them pomes was quick on the draw, and went round knifing each other to pass the time, or drank poison like it was sarsaparilla? No, ma'am, I'll never forget that night, never, and how Jack Cameron blew in with them first nuggets of his, then started borrowing money from Hankin for you know what."

"Yes, I do remember that, all of it. Johnny, what if Mr. Flint dies without saying a word?"

"One less pardner on the Red Jacket, Michael Trupp most likely at the funeral, an' nobody any the wiser. Wouldn't that make a humdinger of a pome?"

"Just plain foolishness," she countered nervously.

"No it ain't." Johnny clawed at his beard with mounting appreciation; the more he pictured this the more it appealed to him. "Mrs. Bowers, ma'am, life here in the Cariboo certainly has its compensations if you'll only look round and spot 'em. All we need now is for somebody to shoot Trupp full of holes. Know what I think?"

"Tell me."

"There must be folks round Williams Creek knows more about him than they're letting out."

Ma sent him a startled look. "Why do you say that?"

"Stands to reason, don't it? He's too well posted. I'm betting when he's shot or strung up—it don't matter which—it'll make quite a story."

Again fell the shadow of Stephen Bowers, but only she could see it.

"I don't know," she said vaguely, "I don't seem to know anything these days, but Mr. Flint was real kind to us on the steamboat. I'm hoping to see him if they'll let me."

"I'm seeing him myself pretty soon, but there's no hurry. Here's the Judge now; he'll have the latest."

Begbie came up slowly, fanning his brown face with a

big straw hat: he gave Ma a friendly salute, noted the wooden tombstone, smiled at Johnny.

"Well, Judge, what's new?"

"Nothing at all; I doubt if there will be any more. Mrs. Bowers, I've seen little of you since I got back."

"I guess we've both been busy, sir. Afraid the South's doing pretty well in the war, aren't they?"

"Yes, and the struggle may last for years."

"I'm figuring them Rebs will be licked before snow flies," put in Johnny.

"I think not, nor will Mr. Lincoln weaken."

"How's the new Road shapin'?" The war had little interest for Mr. Knott.

"A stage may get through late this year—with luck. You'll hardly recognise the old trail when you go out, Mrs. Bowers."

Ma nodded, wondering when that would be, and he, studying the small, clean cut, determined features, saw round her eyes a faint tracery of lines not there before.

"Well, Johnny, I fancy you'll not lack for clients this summer."

"No, sir, I reckon there'll be clients to burn. Remember telling me about those two fancy undertakers from Victoria aiming to open up here?"

"Yes—any developments?"

"You might say there is. They got in all right with the early crowd. I boxed up one of 'em last week, and the other ain't looking too good either. Providence and me is friends these days."

"Bit of a monopolist, aren't you?"

"I work single-handed if that's what you mean." Mr. Knott fished out his note book. "Four inches short of six feet, ain't you?"

"Three and a half—why?"

"Nothing special just now. You folks have a cup of tea?"

"Not this time," said Ma, "I'm going a piece with the Judge."

When they turned along the hillside he was aware of her quick exploratory glances: she wanted to unload something, but wasn't quite sure of herself, so he began to talk, telling her about the war, how Captain Sherman had been brought back from Frisco to take a hand in it, and blockade runners were carrying cotton out of Charleston harbour, daring the gauntlet at night, stealing back with French silks, laces, China tea and English ammunition for the South. She listened in a sort of polite silence but obviously not interested.

"Judge, it's certainly kind of you to take so much trouble over the conversation, but this very minute there's something on my mind. I'd feel better if I could get it off, but don't rightly know if I should."

"Is that because it involves others?"

"Why—why how did you know?"

"Is there anything of any kind that doesn't?"

"No, I guess not."

"Life is becoming a bit of a puzzle, eh, Mrs. Bowers?"

"I guess you're a mind reader," sighed Ma.

"Far from it, but experience suggests that it's only those who have brains, and use them, ever discover that life actually is a riddle. I'd be astonished if you hadn't, and before now."

"Well, I have, and that's a fact. Now supposing you had someone you loved very much, and there was something pretty bad to do with them they didn't know a thing about and weren't responsible for, but if it came out it'd just break their heart—and supposing she was going to be married, and—oh Gosh!"

"Go on, Mrs. Bowers."

"It's just a make believe case anyway," she stammered, "so what's the difference. Would you have to tell the man who was aiming to marry her?"

"That's what's troubling you?"

"It certainly is."

"Then we're dealing with your imaginary conscience?"

A faint gleam came into her eyes. "That's it, that's just it."

"And this other person—this phantom bride, let us call her—is entirely innocent in every way?"

"Same as a new-born lamb."

"Then if it's not your affair," he chuckled, "what on earth are you worrying about?"

"Her shame, Judge, plain black shame if she ever got onto it. That'd pull everything up by the roots."

"I don't quite follow. Assuming that you say nothing, who else is there to raise the matter?"

"There's the law," said she heavily, "that's what I'm scared of. Supposing the law gets hold of that black-hearted villain—he's somewhere round here right now—and the law's been after him for—"

She broke off with a jerk, cheeks hot, but inside she felt cold. The Judge hadn't spoken, his eyes were thoughtful, his face grave as he pieced fragments together. That old warrant for murder—somewhere round here—Mary—young Harper—and surely, oh surely!—James Hollis of Sacramento. The thing seemed to fit, but what could James Hollis be to Mary Bowers? Then, suddenly, a glint of light.

"Mrs. Bowers, to start with you've made no mistake in putting your—your imaginary case like this."

"I'm right glad to hear it, sir."

"Have you discussed it with your husband?"

"No, Judge, I haven't; Dan wouldn't be much help, he ain't got that kind of brain. Why worry him too? He's pretty slow, is Dan; once an idea's in his head nothing will shift it. That's how it stands with the Red Jacket."

"I think you were wise. Y'know the first time we met down on the Fraser I felt we'd understand each other fairly well."

Ma rippled into smiles. "Well, Judge, you were the right man in the right place that day. When I think of Sam Hawkins with his coat off walking up to the Queen of Sheba the way he did, and the queen showing those big yellow teeth of hers like she was saying 'come on, you little runt!' I've just got to laugh. It certainly took the starch out of Sam."

"Ah, that's better; now as to the other matter I'll only say two things for the present—no, three."

"Drive right ahead, sir."

"First, I'm going to regard the case you mentioned as quite imaginary: second, I haven't a single question to ask you: third, I suggest that that conscience of yours is getting a bit out of hand; it's too apt to feel responsible for things beyond its own province."

"You mean I'm going round looking for trouble?"

"People often do that without being aware of it." Then with a keen glance at the small tense face, "Last year I met a man—his name doesn't matter for the one he gave may not have been the right one—and the talk turned on conscience. It was in Lemuel Flint's cabin. I quoted what Shakespeare said about conscience making cowards of us all, and this fellow, he had grey eyes, smooth sloping shoulders, and—"

"Oh God!" breathed Ma, "oh my God!"

"Eh?"

"Nothing—nothing at all."

"Well, this fellow maintained that either you had a conscience or you had not—no halfway about it. I took it he felt you were better off without one. It was the first time I'd heard that argument, so I'm hoping to meet him again and—er—carry it further."

"When did you say that happened?" Ma was staring at a bluejay in a lodgepole pine.

"Just before the freeze-up. Mrs. Bowers, you've got to accept the truth that each of us is responsible for a very

small fraction of life, which is quite enough to keep us busy. You can't protect those you love from the bumps and adversities of existence, and you'll get small thanks if you do attempt it. Whatever the load, each must carry his own. I sound like the Reverend Sheepshanks, don't I?"

"If there's one person in the Cariboo that feels responsible for others, I guess it's yourself," she said eagerly. "Why take so much trouble over me right now?"

"One of my weaknesses—I may get over it."

"I hope to God you don't." Ma was feeling much happier now. "Tell me who's paying for Mr. Flint in hospital—I feel kind of beholden there, and we can scrape up a little."

"Don't think of it; he's not destitute by any means. On my instructions Sergeant Lindsay went through his cabin not long ago in search of some clue. He found none, but there was five hundred dollars in a tin box, also a packet that certainly contained money. This was addressed to me to be opened only after his death."

"Then you think he—he reckoned he was in danger?"

"That's quite possible—who can tell? Ah, here's the sergeant now. Yes, Lindsay?"

"The doctor thinks you'd better come, sir."

Begbie found Flattery elbows on knees, chin cupped between his palms, intent on Lemuel's face. The man was alive, but no more, his breathing stertorous, lips parted, eyes still open. All was very still in the hospital except the murmur from Watson's cubicle where the reception continued.

From outside came a babel of voices, the sound of axes, saws, hammers, the softened thud of black powder from Lowhee or Canadian. Cataline had just brought in a train of Indian ponies from Quesnel Mouth: they stood in the rutted road close by hoofing up clouds of dust in which one caught laughter or a string of curses when a diamond hitch refused to slacken.

"Well?" asked the Judge.

"Any time now."

"Think he'll speak?"

"There's just the off chance."

Then it seemed that something signalled to some remote faculty for Lemuel's pale lips took on the very faintest curve of smile, and the darkly dilated eyes assumed a distant recognition. Now they did not wander: visibly he struggled for expression. Flattery stepped into the other cubicle, silenced the murmur, came back on tiptoe.

"Try him, Judge. You might get something."

"Flint, do you know me?"

The lips curved a shade more; yes, Lemuel knew him. He shifted his right hand a fraction, setting drooping eyes on the talon fingers and pink scar with its crinkled edges. Apparently he connected the Judge with that. Then he gave Flattery a sort of weak look as though suggesting that a better job might have been made of the wound, while Begbie's memory twitched back to a day when on the rise between Upper and Lower Williams he exchanged poetical quotations with a confident, gaily bedizened gambler.

"Can you speak to me, Flint? Try and speak!"

Lemuel got that: something signalled that now he could speak, but wasn't quite ready, and for a moment he contemplated them with a breathless dignity far surpassing anything he had heretofore achieved: he seemed aware of the entire situation, content with it. Then he made the least perceptible sound, and they leaned closer.

"Un-undiscovered country," he whispered, and poured on Begbie so beseeching a look that the Judge gave a startled nod.

"Yes, Flint, I know—I know the rest of it. Tell me about last night. Who was with you—who hit you?"

Either Lemuel did not like this, or memory had not got that far, and he recoiled a little, shutting his eyes, convinc-

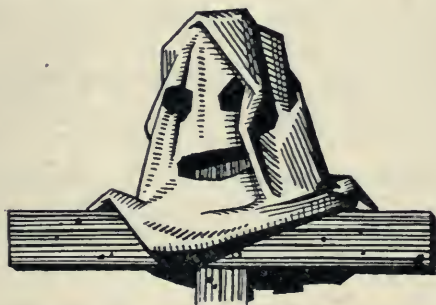
ing Begbie that he was about to enter the undiscovered country and stake a claim of his own.

"Wait!" whispered Flattery, "Wait!"

The Judge, a rock of a man, yet powerless facing such weakness, asked himself was it right thus to harass the dying in order more successfully to pursue the living. Now came a voice low but exceeding clear.

"Everybody—is—certainly very kind!"

"By God!" breathed Flattery, "that clot is dispersing. He's going to live!"



Mr. Flint Goes on a Manhunt

A FORTNIGHT later, Begbie put aside some notes he was reading, lit his pipe, and gave himself up to reflection.

"Sergeant?"

"Sir?"

"Any further developments in that Cunningham robbery business?"

"No, sir, nothing, but the gold has not been taken out yet, the deputies along the Road are sure of that. Practically nothing has gone south except under escort."

"The identity of every man who consigns gold to the escort is clearly established?"

"Yes, sir, I'll answer for that. What's more in the past ten days I've been round to all the producing claims to check up."

"Good! Now getting back to the Cunningham affair, do you notice any similarity between that and the time when Flint was stabbed last fall?"

"Yes, sir, I do."

"I thought you might. I've just been going over the statement Flint then made, comparing it with what he told me the other day. In the first case his description of his assailant sounded reasonably exact, which one would expect, but at the same time it might have applied to hundreds of men then in this district."

"That's right, sir, with the result that it didn't take us anywhere."

"Nor did Flint seem to have any desire for revenge,

which is—well—more charitable, if one puts it that way, than one would expect.”

“That struck me too, sir.”

“Another point is that if he wanted to mislead us he went about it in a very practical fashion.”

“Well, sir, it’s my idea he was shielding someone. What do you say?”

“Nothing as yet, but why shield anyone? With that in your head, consider what he now tells us. Here it is.”

‘It was round ten o’clock, and stopped raining. I’d been inside all day on account of the storm and wanted some air, so took a little pasear along the south bank of the creek. Didn’t see or speak to a soul. I guess the boys were at Dexter’s party. It was dark. I’d been out maybe a quarter hour when someone seemed to loom up right in front, and I got this crack on the head. When I woke up I was in hospital. That’s all I know.’

“What do you make of it, sergeant?”

Lindsay screwed up his face, “Pretty flat, sir.”

“It is, and nothing I put to him got me any further; he was quite composed, showed no hesitation whatever. Doctor Flattery heard all he said and assured me that the man’s brain was perfectly clear. Now, adding this to the statement and description of last fall, does anything suggest itself?”

“Well, sir, in the first case Flint couldn’t avoid giving some description of the man he was playing with, and if he wanted to mislead us he’d describe him as just the opposite of what he was. That’s how I see it.”

“Exactly: clean-shaven instead of whiskers; square shoulders instead of sloping, and so forth.”

“I see what you’re driving at, sir; that’s the fellow you told me you found in Flint’s shack last fall. But why should he hobnob with a man who’d stabbed him? It beats me.”

“You may well ask: it could only be that this man had something on him, and in some way Flint was in his power.”

"Then Flint put up with the assault in the hope of getting even later on?" suggested Lindsay.

"That might be so if there is anything in the theory, but as it stands we have nothing against this sloping-shouldered stranger whose name is Hollis. No proof, sergeant, no proof; no circumstantial evidence, so for the present we can only lie low and wait. There's nothing on which to proceed. I'll increase the reward for Michael Trupp, and see what happens. Also it's best that you give no hint of the probability that these two men are identical."

"Very good, sir. Any instructions as to Flint? He's back in his shack this week."

The Judge considered this for a moment. His own perception reminded him that there were others involved in this affair, innocent ones whom he was determined to protect so far as duty to his office allowed but how he might ultimately secure this he could not imagine, and was searching about when—! It came like a flash of distant lightning—was not this what the maimed gambler had already undertaken at whatever cost to himself? It would explain so much! In that instant Begbie felt the faint but unmistakable urge which signifies that instinct—sheer instinct—had set him on the right track. In the past this signal had never erred, and—

"Eh, what did you say, sergeant?"

"Asked whether you had any special instructions with regard to Flint, sir."

"None."

The door closed. Now the jigsaw puzzle began to assume some design. Sorting the pieces, he set about assembling them. One, portraying a man with sloping shoulders interlocked with another that bore a warrant for arrest issued many years ago. A third that showed a hand with a hole in it fitted to a fourth on which was a masked head. This block linked with the fifth and sixth pieces that carried the

faces of Mary and Mrs. Bowers, while into these dovetailed another with a picture of Lemuel Flint. So that was it!

The longer Begbie pondered, the more reasonable did it seem. Take one, only one, block away, and the pattern dissolved, and he felt a sort of awe in realising how inextricably mingled are the lives and fortunes of the guilty and innocent, how impossible to administer justice to the one and spare the sufferings of the other. Always he had hoped for that, and now, though experience proved that it never worked out, he would try again.

And if the theory was sound, with the jigsaw juzzle the solution, Lemuel Flint must needs be an Olympian liar cast in a Spartan but deceptive mould.

"Sergeant?"

"Sir?"

"You gave that cash and packet back to Flint?"

"I did, sir, as you told me.

"Any remarks on his part?"

"He handed me a hundred dollars for Doctor Flattery and the hospital, which I delivered; also he said that he quite understood, was sorry to have made so much trouble, and it wouldn't happen again."

"That's all, eh?"

"Yes, sir. But I've an idea there's a lot he didn't say."

* * *

Mr. Knott, gnawing off a chew, began going through an assortment of wooden tombstones stacked against the wall of his shed: presently he selected one, scanned it thoughtfully, laid it on his bench, and began to scrape off the name *Lemuel Flint*.

He had obliterated the first three letters when a shadow fell across his work, and he looked up to see Mary and Mrs. Bowers.

"Come right in an' set down out of the sun, ma'am. Well, Miss Mary, how's tricks with you folks?"

"All well, Mr. Knott, how are you?"

"Same as you find me, an' kind of rushed. The interment business is looking up in this town—kind of dead heat between me an' Doc Flattery."

"Well," smiled Ma, staring hard at the tombstone, "I know someone who fooled you both. I said you were moving too fast. Mr. Flint's looking as spry as ever he did in his life."

"Yes, ma'am, so they tell me. Right out of the jaws of death, eh? Which means his skull was thicker than the Doc figured. But there's compensations just the same. Know what party I'm labelling this for now?"

"How could I?"

"It's number two of them fancy undertakers that blew in from Victoria with the rush: that wipes competition right out, so you never can tell, can you? Nowadays I look at some young feller breezin' along like he owned the Cariboo, an' say to myself 'while there's life there's hope'—that is for me. Nothing turned up on that Cunningham robbery?"

"Not that I've heard of."

"Remember what I said a while ago about some parties here in Richfield knowing more of that Mr. Mike Trupp than they was letting out?"

"Is that what you think?" asked Mary.

"It certainly is. Ain't the same indicated by this last business?"

"But why should anyone protect such a—a desperado?"

"You're asking me. No reason yet, but you can bet there will be later on. There's a little bird whisperin' right now that our fourth partner on the Jacket ain't told the whole story, and—why, Mr. Flint! glad to see you—step right in."

Lemuel nodded, took off his hat to the ladies while his dark eyes noted the tombstone. As Mrs. Bowers said, he looked as spry as ever, but to her there was a difference.

"You've made a wonderful recovery," smiled Mary, "I

can hardly believe it. It seems just the other day when we saw you in hospital and you were pretty sick."

"Yes, miss, and I always thought this climate salubrious. I started to pick up after the Doc raised a little piece of my skull. 'Don't feel a thing now.'"

"Needn't take any notice of what I'm doing either," Mr. Knott's tone was faintly apologetic as he reached for the sandpaper, "but this sort of thing is liable to happen any-time, and business is business. How's tricks with you?"

"It's certainly nice to be round again, and my commercial occupation is attractive."

Johnny sniffed. His own business, as he said, was booming, and his mind travelled back to a night last winter when in the fullness of heart he had made Mr. Flint an offer of partnership; but, though courteous at the time, Mr. Flint had never referred to it since then, and now Jack Parsons had put an end to that dream.

"Well, the betting was against you, but you've made the boys sit up. Say, I don't see no reward for ketchin' the feller that slugged you—how's that?"

"Because I don't know who slugged me," replied Lemuel with dignity.

As he said this his eyes just happened to meet those of Mrs. Bowers and in them she read a resolution that went straight to her heart.

"What with getting your hand perforated too, you ain't in much luck these days. Reckon it might ha' been the same party?"

"It might, and again it might not."

"Ain't you got a sort of sensation this gent ain't quit an' is laying for you right now?"

"Mr. Knott," protested Mary, "why do you go on talking like that? How could anyone be such a—a devil?"

Ma's lips had become dry: she was watching Lemuel, whose placidity remained undisturbed, and there came over her a sudden, inescapable conviction that here stood a man

who would always be a part of their own lives. Now it seemed they were so linked, and in such a fashion, that never, never would he be removed from what the future held for Mary and herself.

Then Johnny said:—

“Well, miss, with round ten thousand men in gunshot from Williams Creek, it’s more’n possible. Course I ain’t interested in what any party was before he reaches me, I take ’em as I find ’em, with no questions asked. Mr. Flint, I certainly thought we was short a partner on the Jacket. How’s she going down there? Been too busy to see for myself.”

“Right now, I don’t know—been pretty occupied myself. Matter of fact I dropped round to ask if you had a gun you could lend me—rifle, not shot gun.”

“Never owned one in my life—no use for ’em. Say, what—?”

“It doesn’t matter.”

“Sing has one, a darn good one though.” He realised from Lemuel’s tone that questioning was pointless. “You see him—he’ll fix you up.”

“Thank you. You see, Mrs. Bowers, it’s kind of stationary behind that counter, and I aim to get a little exercise.”

“Why of course.” Something began to tick in Ma’s brain; what it signalled made her breathless, but Lemuel’s expression was one of complete composure, so she let it go at that. “There’s a first-rate idea.” she added heartily.

“I didn’t know you could shoot,” said Mary.

“Well, miss, fact is when I was a boy I did a good deal of practice. It kind of amused me, so I figure to take it up again.”

“Reckon to get some of your own back?” cackled Johnny.

“Being as I don’t know who the party was, Mr. Knott, the same would be difficult. Well, ladies, I’ll be moving on.”

“Come and have a cup of tea with us first,” put in Mary.

When Lemuel was pleased or disturbed he didn’t show it

in the ordinary way; perhaps his eyes would soften a little or his lips tighten just a shade: it was like that now, and Mrs. Bowers, who had come to know him well, could see that he was touched.

"Why, I guess—that's certainly very kind—but—"

"Now, Mr. Flint, don't you sidestep," Ma's voice was definite, "it isn't so long since we had tea with you. You too, Johnny, if you want it."

"Nope, I guess not, too much of a rush on here. Say, pardner, you'll excuse me about this tombstone being somewhat premature, but—"

"That's all right, and you might not be so far out at that," said Lemuel quietly.

"Say! what are you driving at?"

No answer to this, only a gesture that might have meant anything, but to Ma it was significant because already she had jumped to a conclusion remarkably near the truth. This stuck in her head later when she was pouring tea.

"Thinking of doing a little hunting, Mr. Flint?" she hazarded.

"Yes, ma'am."

"That leg of a mule deer we had at the reading party—remember?—It was awfully good," said Mary.

"It certainly was," agreed Ma. "You won't go alone, Mr. Flint? It's pretty easy to get lost in these parts; there's quite a lot that do, and are never heard of again."

"I don't reckon to go very far, ma'am."

"But you never can tell."

"Ma, why shouldn't Dan go too? He's been shovelling gravel every day since the break-up."

Mrs. Bowers hesitated. This, if her conclusions were right, meant complications.

"He must go," went on the girl, "Mr. Flint might be out all night, and two's company; I don't believe it's safe being in the bush alone, you might fall and break something, and—"

She didn't finish: Lemuel's eyes, fixed on her, held something she had never seen there before, a sort of hunger so spontaneous and intense that she flushed, gave a constrained little laugh. Simultaneously it faded so swiftly that she doubted her own eyes. Then Mrs. Bowers, who had been thinking hard, came in:—

"I think she's right; Dan's more used to hunting than you are. Would you be away over night?"

"That's likely, ma'am?"

"Where did you think of trying?"

"They tell me I'm likely to find something round Poor-man's Creek," said Lemuel quietly.

"How far is that?" asked Mary.

"Not far, miss, maybe ten or twelve miles. It's kind of deserted. I can get a ride most of the way on those pack trains going back south."

Ma, listening, felt that somehow all this was inevitable. No mule deer did he seek, but a man of whom he had determined to rid the earth. It was strange to hear him, strange to see how unconscious was Mary of his purpose, and the reason for it. Plain too that now he cared deeply, but how deeply she herself had not perceived till this moment.

Certainly here was a crusade, and he must not go alone; she pictured his meeting with the human mule deer. Was he not aware that in this last deadly game the cards were all against him? But this did not affect his calm, and his manner towards the girl he was risking all to protect, brought a lump into her throat. But destiny was at work and how could one affect destiny?

As to Dan, by now she seemed to have exhausted every subterfuge and evasion with regard to the identity of Michael Trupp, but the day must come, perhaps was dawning now, when he would know the truth.

"Well," she said, "I'll fix it with Dan, and put you up some grub. How about getting the deer back."

Lemuel gave one of his grave smiles. "I never thought of that."

"Couldn't we get Oliver to hitch up Barnee and drive us out to meet them?" asked Mary suddenly.

"That's right, daughter, we will. About what time, Mr. Flint?"

"Well, ma'am, suppose we leave early tomorrow morning round five—a pack train will be starting then—and you meet us the next day at the ten mile post from here. We'd be there on the lookout."

"I'll fix it. Got all you want?"

Lemuel protested that he had everything; he'd see Mr. Sing about the rifle. It was all so easy and natural, with Mary so interested and evidently more and more attracted, that Ma had to make an effort to remember what lay behind this excursion, which gave everything a sort of unreality; but at the same time it was so vital, with so much more involved than came to the surface, that she felt she'd never forget these few moments and in later days they'd often recall themselves when least expected.

And Lemuel? He was clinging to the immediate present for this interlude of intimate friendship might never occur again: he was loathe to go, and made a kind of mental photograph of Ma with her wise, practical, understanding manner, and Mary, who seemed nearer than ever before. Thanks to them he had stepped up and out of what he had been into what he was now, another Lemuel for which he had no conceit but infinitely greater respect. Now he only had to be himself with no false front to maintain; only had to follow what he recognised as his deepest, truest instincts, and he figured that when a man owed that to any woman or pair of women he owed a lot. And he might never see them again.

Presently, because though it was hard to go it became still harder to stay, he reached for his wide-brimmed hat.

"Well, ma'am and Miss Mary, it's certainly a privilege

Cariboo Road

to know you both. I hope I'll strike something on Poor-man's Creek, but you never can tell, can you? Mrs. Bowers, did you ever read the works of the poet, Mr. Jack G. Whittier?"

"Never heard of him, Mr. Flint, as I remember."

"There's something he wrote sticks in my head—it runs this way:—

‘the tissue of the life to be
we weave with colours all our own,
and in the fields of destiny
we reap as we have sown.’

I kind of agree with that. So long, ladies."

* * *

Mr. Sing, who hailed from the same part of the world as the Queen of Sheba, sat in the shade outside Barker's cook-camp smoking a mixture of Virginia twist and opium; his loose body was lax, his manner contemplative, and with oriental calm he surveyed the violent exertions of a rabble of white men a hundred yards distant on Lower Williams.

The scene always gave him a sensation of rest: this frenzy in pursuit of something that never lasted long after they did get it struck him as being pointless and in tune with an opinion he had long since formed about white men in general of whom he now knew as much as was useful, while of him they knew as much—and no more—than he desired them to know.

Three times a day he, the best cook in the Cariboo, fed Barker's gang, watched them gorge then surge back to Lower Williams, heard shouts, curses and laughter that ruffled not his Asiatic calm, for these great children of fortune differed from himself as widely as did their bushy beards from the sparse plantation on his own fat chin; nor could such labours ever open for him the suave avenue of thought he found so inviting when he sat at mah-jong

with the proprietor of the new Chinese laundry recently opened in Barkerville.

True, he himself was interested in a claim, the Red Jacket, but conditions there were dissimilar. No excitement could be observed on that manhandled gravel heap. When last fall were uncovered the two small nuggets now pendant from the necks of Mary and Mrs. Bowers, Sing privately suspected that they had been salted by some person unknown for reasons equally mysterious, but he kept that to himself. He did not care what happened to the claim. He liked Mr. Knott, having found that their respective philosophies were well matched, and Mr. Knott's views of life and death were, for a white man, unusually sound. The addition of Dan as a partner meant nothing to Mr. Sing. If Mr. Bowers insisted on losing money, why let him, but when, unexpectedly, Mr. Flint acquired a share, Mr. Sing felt a throb of real interest. He had seen Mr. Flint at work in the Hotel de France, approved his cultivated manners, his poise and finesse. True, he did not play mah-jong, but Mr. Sing had an idea that if he really went at it he would soon make an opponent of no small skill.

He was pondering this when he saw a tall figure approaching.

"Good day, Mr. Sing."

"Velly fine day, Mistah Flint. How's things?"

"I'm not complaining. How's yourself?"

"All lite—things plitty good." Mr. Sing's vocabulary tended to labials. "You see Led Jacket lately?"

"Why, no, I've been kind of busy. Anything doing?"

Mr. Sing expressed the opinion that there was as much doing right now as ever would be. Mr. Flint agreed.

"Doc Flatty, he fixum hole in head?"

"Certainly he did. Yes, I guess the Red Jacket is a dead one."

Mr. Sing, continuing to smoke, made no comment, and

Cariboo Road

together they contemplated Lower Williams where some five thousand ounces a day were being brought to light from bed-rock. But if the comparison with the Red Jacket presented itself, neither referred to it. The sun shone, and all was peace.

"Johnny tells me you've got a gun—a good one," said Lemuel after a long pause.

"You go shoot?"

"I guess so."

"When?"

"Tomorrow—pretty early."

"What place?"

"I'm trying Poorman's Creek—know it? Good spot for mule deer—they're fat now."

"How flah Plooman's Creek?"

"Not far from the Road—about ten miles out."

"You go alone?"

"No, Dan's coming."

"Maybe good place find Michael Tlupp?" suggested Sing, eyes now fixed on a grey squirrel in the fork of a nearby lodgepole pine.

Lemuel sent him a sharp glance: why should he bring that up?

"Maybe, I don't know, it don't matter. Mrs. Bowers wants some fresh meat."

"Sing velly glad see Michael Tlupp one end of lope. You wait."

He went into the cook-camp, returning presently with a long-barrelled, small bore rifle of which the stock had an inlaid tracery of Arabesque design in thread silver. He fondled it for a moment, ran an oily rag through the bore, then loaded with extreme care, wrapping the ball in a shred of thin cotton. Powder, ball, cotton and cap he took from a silk bag divided into compartments. This procedure was a sort of sacrament, and Lemuel missed nothing.

Finally the gun went up: Mr. Sing cuddled a yellowish

cheek against the glossy stock, sighted on the grey squirrel, crooked a thin forefinger. The squirrel landed with a soft thud.

"Say! I never knew you could shoot."

"Plenty much Chinaman nevah tell," remarked Mr. Sing blandly. "Now you."

Lemuel took the weapon with respect, loaded exactly as had its owner, while, watching him, Sing approved his light, dexterous touch.

"You've cleaned out the squirrels—what'll I shoot at? Say, toss up that can."

Mr. Sing's eyes narrowed a shade, he nodded; an empty tomato can went sailing high: as it turned to descend sounded a report, a sharp 'ping'. The can lurched, came to earth perforated.

"Didn't know you could shoot, Mistah Flint."

"There's plenty of white man don't tell—sometimes, partner. This gun is a daisy, and I'm certainly obliged. So long, Mr. Sing."

Acknowledging with suitable dignity the ribald remarks of the numerous friends he encountered, he went round by the Red Jacket to confer with Dan, but found an untenanted claim with scattered tools lying about.

Dan at that moment was in serious converse with his wife, having turned up soon after Lemuel left. The minute she saw him she knew what was the matter, but, saying nothing, made fresh tea and waited for what might come. Presently he sent her a sheepish look.

"Well, husband?"

"Well, mother?"

"Why not come out with it?"

"I've been thinking," said he, feeling for his pipe.

"Surprise you if I said the same thing?"

"No, it wouldn't," then with a burst, "it's the Jacket."

"Always has been since we got here, hasn't it?"

He nodded. "It's like persuading yourself something's

Cariboo Road

the case, and all the time a voice over your shoulder is saying it isn't."

"Go right on, husband."

"Well, I'm stuck—don't know how to quit—don't know how not to," he rammed his pipe with a hard forefinger, stared as though it were something new. "Sounds crazy, eh?"

"Dan, that's the best news I've heard for months; makes it easier for me too. The Jacket hasn't licked you—don't feel that for a minute—it's just a dead heat, an' you're back where you started. I couldn't have stuck it much longer myself, so let's quit right now. Who cares anyway?"

"I do—I care a lot—sold our place—carted you and Mary up here—"

This was all Ma needed: she took over and opened up:—

"Dan, I was never one to stand in your way; you didn't cart us up here, we just weren't going to be left behind, and if we've made some kind of a home for you that's all we care about. The Cariboo got into your system, and had to be worked out. Now that's all over, and no bones broken. Say, how would you feel about cattle raising for a change?"

"Raise cattle! me?"

"Why not? Who do you reckon is the biggest, wisest, kindest man in these parts?"

"There's only one—that's the Judge."

"Yes, the Judge—" Then she went on telling him of her talk with Begbie, and saw coming into his eyes a look different from the one she was getting used to. "The Judge says the Government wants people like us to make a home in this district and help build up the country. It'll take a while, but he'll help, and pretty soon we needn't care whether school keeps or not. We'd have to start right soon and get a roof over our heads before the snow flies. It's good land round the two hundred mile post, and won't cost us a cent. I'd like a real home on good land where I'd have a garden. And, Dan," she went on wistfully,

"there's something permanent about a herd of cattle, and oh, how I want to settle down somewheres and stay put."

She said all this in a breath, then gazed at him as though startled by the outburst, while he realised that this was the very first time she had ever announced what she really wanted, and that with her behind him nothing should be impossible except unearthing gold where it did not exist; so, just as she had hoped, this new plan began to displace the golden dream that, by himself, he could not quite kill, and there crept into him a sense of liberation, so that he blinked and nodded, and sent her a grin, and felt far younger than an hour ago.

"Got it all fixed, eh mother?"

"We wouldn't be leaving much behind here, would we?"

"Nothing: talked to Mary yet? What about her and young Harper?"

"That's all over, I'm sure of it. Never was much in it anyway."

"Well, we haven't seen so much of him this season, and that's a fact; he don't often show up on the Jacket."

"Nor here either. He's got money of his own, Dan, plenty to live on—he told me so—while Mary hasn't got one cent. I don't believe it would ever work. He's as nice as they make 'em, but if he'd been really in love he'd have come right out with it, and darn the consequences—the way you did. I kind of think she was waiting for that, but it never happened. Maybe she's got someone else in mind."

"Who else? There's nobody round here."

"She don't say a word about it, so why worry? Right now we've got enough to think of."

Again he felt the strong influence of her courage—no regrets—no criticism—just an undefeatable something that had never failed him, in which he now perceived his great fortification. This cabin of which she had been the centre spoke for her.

"You haven't had much of a life with me, mother."

Life—she reflected, what was life anyway? There came back to her one night in the Fraser Canyon when long after the others were asleep she sat by the embers of the fire watching fairy lights twinkle far up and down the great gorge where the human caterpillar rested on the hard trek north. That was like life: you knew where the caterpillar started, and where it would end, but nothing more. Labour, laughter, tears, the dream, the awakening, the effort—always the effort—and hope—always hope! What right had anyone to expect more out of life?

“Husband,” she replied gently, “don’t you ever say that again—women don’t like it. Now you’re taking a couple of days off before we start packing up.”

“Why that?”

“’Cause you’re going hunting with Mr. Flint, and I can do with some fresh meat. Mary and I will meet you on the way back with Oliver and his cart. First time I’ve been on the new Road. Mr. Flint’s all set on it.”

“Can he shoot?” asked Dan, liking this idea.

“I guess he can do most anything he has a mind to.”

“Maybe. Say, mother, sure it’s fresh meat he’s after?”

Ma didn’t fancy this. “What on earth do you mean—why not?”

“I’ve been thinking about him and that fellow who cracked his skull: I’d say he hopes to get even, somehow. There’s something else—it’s occurred to me more than once—did it ever strike you that Steve might be somewheres round here?”

“Dan Bowers! what an idea! Steve’s likely dead long ago.”

“Maybe so, but he ain’t the kind that’s easy killed, and this fellow’s way of doing business reminds me of him.”

“You—you haven’t said this to anyone else?”

“No, of course not.”

“Well, I wouldn’t, specially to Mr. Flint; it’s too crazy.”

“I guess you’re right: matter of fact I don’t know as I’d

recognise Steve now. Never saw much of him since we were knee high, and not once after he married. We didn't mix."

"Best put all that out of your head," Ma was breathing more easily now, "and have a good time with Mr. Flint. He might know something about cattle too."

"Surprised if he does." Dan lifted his gun from its rack over the hearth, sighted along the barrel, "That feels fine."

"Maybe he's better posted than you think," said Ma cryptically. "Now what do you want to take with you?"

* * *

Dan, hands linked around his knees, sat gazing over a tumbled, ravine-scarred vista where spindling pine pricked innumerable slopes; lower, the growth was heavier with dogwood, silvery Balm of Gilead poplar, white birch and patches of warm, green spruce; lower still lifted a faint chuckle where a hidden creek followed its boulder-strewn channel. The sun was hot. The distance danced in a vast, oppressive silence. Beside Dan stretched Lemuel, the wide-brimmed hat over his face.

They were both tired; they had walked for miles, slept one night in the bush, slapped mosquitoes, seen no game, certainly not the kind Lemuel searched for, and now headed back towards the Road.

"Funny how it all came about," murmured Dan as though addressing the Cariboo at large, "first my woman pushed me into it, now she's herding me out."

"I guess she was right both times." Lemuel smiled under his hat. "Not sorry, are you?"

"No, but I kind of regret you put that money into the Jacket when there weren't any special reason for it. Why?"

"Just an idea, Mr. Bowers, and it don't matter now. I'm quitting the Cariboo too. Where did you think of going?"

"Somewheres round Williams Lake to raise cattle. What about you—back to Frisco?"

Lemuel did not answer directly: as things stood, it might

Cariboo Road

be that he would never quit the Cariboo should Michael Trupp spot him first, but that was for himself only. Rolling over, he regarded Dan's broad, good-natured, sweating face, and decided it was an unfair imposition to have accepted his company, the company of so good a friend on this foolhardy expedition.

"It's not so important what happens to a party provided he's single. Different with you."

"Yes, I guess so."

"Miss Mary never had any brothers or sisters?"

"Eh—what's that?" Dan stumbled a little, "she's all we've got, Mr. Flint. What made you ask?"

"She's the kind one remembers—like Mrs. Bowers too," he added gallantly. "I guess she's pretty interested in young Harper?"

"I thought so too, but the wife says there's nothing to it; she thinks there's somebody else. However Mary don't say a thing."

At this a wild hope stirred in Lemuel but it was too remote, too incredible, so he put it away; also since noon of yesterday he had been hunting for Mary's father in order to kill him, and life made no provision for circumstances of that kind.

"I reckon we won't be seeing much of each other later on," continued Dan, "which makes this trip quite a pleasure."

Lemuel, nodding, agreed that he too was pleased. "And I'll take this opportunity to say I certainly appreciate the kindness of—of all your family. I won't forget it either."

"That's all right. How far do you reckon from here to the Road?"

"Mile and a half, not more, and—say, Dan! don't move! what's that right opposite—see anything over there?"

"No—yes—behind those alders?"

"Sit tight."

Something greyish green did stir across the ravine; 'twas

set in a thin patch of scrub: staring hard you could make yourself believe it had the shape of a man; again it hadn't. Now it merged, blended, vanished. There came no sound.

"That was no deer."

"Then what was it?" Lemuel's voice sounded a shade thin.

"Don't know," Dan laid his gun across his knees. "Better wait."

They remained motionless; no foliage stirred, and when Dan got up nothing happened.

"Might have been a man, but I don't believe there's anyone round here now. The night before we started Oliver was telling me this place was all raked over when the rush first came north before it hit Williams Creek. There wasn't a colour—that's why it's called what it is."

"On your right!" creaked Lemuel, "look on your right."

His gun jumped up as a big brown buck ambled from a fold in the hill not fifty yards away, and halted for one instant. Lemuel's forefinger crooked, the rifle spoke, the deer jumped, faltered, recovered, went plunging down, then up the other slope. There all motion ceased.

"By God! you got him."

Five minutes later Dan stooped over the carcass to cut its throat.

"Fat as butter. Didn't know you could shoot like that."

Lemuel did not answer: he seemed to have lost all interest in the deer, and was gazing at a faintly marked trail that led through the scrub towards another fold in the hill. Now he reloaded, sent Dan an odd glance and moved on.

"Say I want some help here; the folks will be out on the Road by now; we haven't too much time."

"Dan, step this way first."

Something in his voice made Dan obey, and he saw from where Lemuel was standing another rift open in the hill, short, narrow, vertical as though cleft by an axe, making a sort of pass fifty feet wide. Beyond this was a glade with

Cariboo Road

steep slopes on either side. In the glade stood a shelter built of vertical poles, mudplastered.

"Something queer about this, Dan; there is someone round here!"

They went on, cautiously, guns ready, but when Lemuel gave a shout there was no answer.

The crazy door of the shelter hung open. Inside were signs of recent occupation: dishes at one end of a rough table—scattered cards—three bunks lined with cedar brush had grey woollen blankets—shovels—picks—a gold pan.

"That must have been a man we saw, but where is he now?" said Dan dubiously.

Lemuel stood very still, every nerve in him tingled as instinct whispered that he was on the edge of discovery, and again he questioned Dan's presence at this place and time. Touching nothing in the shelter, he went out, looked about. Nothing moved. Another faint trail led a short distance through scrub. Here the hillside was open with a series of long shallow ledges running parallel with the slope; they resembled gigantic steps so that the earth seemed terraced like a hillside in Lombardy.

On one of these, fifty feet above the creek, the mouth of a tunnel gaped beside a dump of waste, forming a sort of darkened eye, six feet high, four wide.

"What did I tell you?" scoffed Dan, "all the fools aren't dead yet; that's one of them we spotted."

"Then why didn't he answer?" Lemuel's lips had become dry, his brain tense. "Wait! I'm thinking."

"Better get at that deer—do your thinking later on."

"I want to look at that tunnel."

"Don't be a damned fool; it ain't safe—that timbering is all rotten. Come on."

But to Lemuel the tunnel beckoned; now there could be no holding back, and certainly this was Poorman's Creek.

"I'm going in, Dan—won't be a minute. Keep your eye open."

Stooping, rifle in hand, he stepped forward, a half-blinded human mole. The supporting stulls were at all angles, the lagging haphazard with gaps in the roof through which had sifted mounds of gravels that made progress laborious, sometimes on hands and knees with little head-room, but he pushed on drawn by something he knew he must obey.

The tunnel was of irregular width, evidently the work of amateur diggers: at thirty feet from the mouth it turned, continuing at right angles for another thirty, and here, at the face, Lemuel could distinguish nothing, hear nothing but his own hard breathing; so he stood the rifle against the lagging, and felt about. At one spot the lagging gave way under his touch, but there was no rain of fine stuff from inside.

"That's queer," he said half aloud, "that's queer."

Reaching in, there was only vacancy: reaching further he encountered something round, hard, nearly the size of his head. Then another bulging lump—the same.

Instantly he knew what these were, and his throat contracted. Two months now since he stood, not alone, on the bank of Upper Williams with one of those sacks of Cunningham gold!

For a moment he could not move: he kept his fingers in that electrical contact while a wave of triumph swept through him. He pictured the return to camp, and then a swift chill of reality fell over him. How did he, Lemuel Flint, know where the gold was? Had he not lied and perjured himself for the sake of a woman? He could, standing here in black darkness, visualise the Judge listening to his story—the third story, and since the first two were false what chance had this one of acceptance? Here he stood, successful, doomed, damned and desperate. And how near was Michael Trupp?

But he must get the gold to a safe place, so, rifle in hand, he toiled back to the tunnel mouth where Dan sat smoking.

"Seen anyone?"

Cariboo Road

"Not a soul. All through now? Satisfied?"

"Dan, come in—follow me—quick."

"What's up now—seen a ghost?—You look it."

"Don't talk—come on."

"Suppose I'll need the gun?" asked Dan resignedly.

"No, the tunnel's empty—I'm leaving mine here—there's something to—to carry out."

Dan, looking at him sharply, said no more. As they wormed their way in his bulk, rubbing along the stulls, brought down more fine gravel, and when they reached the face Lemuel felt in the dark.

"Give me your hand—there—no—higher—now further in—what are you touching?"

"By God!" choked Dan, "that feels like—like—"

"The Cunningham—two sacks."

"Say, what made you—"

"Never mind now. We've got to move it out of here. Go easy."

"We're in Trupp's home town all right, but, look here, how—"

"Shut up!" Lemuel's brain was darting about, already formulating one explanation after another, but realising only too clearly that he was the prisoner of his own well-meant, sacrificial deceptions. This gold was like a rope round his neck; one false step and he was done for.

They moved slowly, gingerly, with sand sifting down on their necks. Turning the angle came a broadening of light, and outside the sunshine looked incandescent. Then blinking, burdened, they reached the tunnel mouth.

"Drop that stuff," rasped a hard voice, "hands up!"

Three men stood there, the one in the middle unarmed, wearing a baggy black mask. At his feet lay two rifles. The others, unmasked, had the faces of strangers, and their guns covered the tunnel mouth. Lemuel's pulse drummed as he stared at his late confederate, and caught the glitter of steely eyes through their slits. Dan stood frozen, for about

the masked figure was something faintly familiar, but the whole thing seemed unreal. When the hard eyes turned on him there was an instant of hesitation, then:—

“Get back inside. No tricks!”

Death poised at two angles left no alternative: they retreated, feeling at the timbering. One stranger squatted against a tree, gun ready; the second picked up the captured weapons. Trupp, stepping forward, lifted the two sacks.

“Make yourselves at home. You’ll hear from me later—no—perhaps you won’t.”

Obscurity received the human moles as far as the angle of the tunnel where they stopped. From here one could see the patch of light at the mouth, but nothing stirred, and the Cariboo relapsed into silence, and now came the deadening conviction that this thing was real but as yet could not be put into words, and several moments passed before Dan spoke in a thin tone.

“They’ll be waiting out on the Road now,” and when Lemuel did not answer he went on, “no way of letting them know—that’s too bad. My wife’s likely to stick there till we do show up, which won’t be till those fellows have got clear, and God knows how long that’ll be.”

Lemuel said nothing: evidently his companion was not seized of the situation and reckoned only on temporary imprisonment, while he himself knew much better, and the knowledge clamped round his heart making it hard to breathe. Steve Bowers alias James Hollis alias Michael Trupp! The complexity and danger of it made him wince, and should he let in the light on Dan’s ignorance what advantage lay there? Again he cursed his own weakness in having this man with him. Yet the wife of the innocent, understanding what she must have understood, had insisted. Was his own safety, the safety of Lemuel Flint, as much to her as that—or to someone else?

He was still groping when Dan came in again.

“But how are we going to know when they do clear out?

Cariboo Road

And I'll swear there's more gold in those sacks than was lifted from the Cunningham—700 ounces, wasn't it? And, look, here, Flint, it was Trupp all right who cracked your skull that night after he'd knocked out Tom Watson and was getting away with the stuff. We talked too soon a while ago; he's a pretty smart fellow, and—"

"For God's sake, shut up."

"I can't," persisted Dan raggedly, "I've got to talk. Oliver'll be out on the Road, and maybe Johnny, and when you killed that deer it's likely they heard the shot. That'll keep them waiting, and maybe Trupp will run into them, and wouldn't that make a hell of a story when this all comes out?"

He rambled on, finding, it seemed, reinforcement in the sound of his own voice till it was clear to Lemuel that this man had no power of quick readjustment to circumstances—no imagination—which perhaps was a good thing because Lemuel could not see any solution for himself. Either he'd stay there and starve, or escape into a trap of duplicity he himself had fabricated. And if now he did give Dan the whole story, starting on the *Brother Jonathan* and through to that night on Upper Williams, he would only be assailed with a rain of questions to which there was no answer. It was easier to say nothing, then he and his story would vanish together.

Evening drew in slowly; the pale curtain at the tunnel mouth faded a little, but there would be no real outer darkness on a fine night in July just a cessation of glare and grateful coolness dipping the Cariboo in a sort of luminous opacity, and it was now that the unpredictable happened.

First came a soft thud, followed by a vibration in the hillside itself. Then a sliding rattling sound of great weight in motion. Through this a faint and very distant shouting. Next, a ponderous roar with broken, individual crashes punctuating its deeper rumble. At this every timber in the tunnel creaked and groaned, the faulty lagging gaped re-

leasing a dry rain, the curtain at the adit mouth was blacked out.

"God Almighty! what was that?"

But Lemuel felt at this moment only a sort of dumb relief, a liberation from all further self-questioning. He was sorry for Dan, sorry for the others, but not for himself. His past in retrospect was unattractive, the present still less so, and the future . . .? Well—now there was no future.

"That—?" he said with all his old impeccable dignity, "why, Dan, don't you know? We're buried alive!"



19

Rescue

MR. KNOTT sat on a log, chewing a lump of spruce gum; on either side of him was a stretch of the new Road hacked through standing timber, leaving smouldering piles and blackened stumps. The Road was a ribbon of scarred earth, pitted with pot holes. Near him Mrs. Bowers was talking to Mary.

The sun smote strongly here, cicadas shrilled, grasshoppers jumped, no breeze stirred, and the women mopped their hot faces. Oliver was there with his two-wheeled cart, and kept feeding Barnee with wisps of grass. Mr. Sing sat motionless in the shade, fanning himself with his conical straw hat. Young Harper perched on a boulder, looking bored. Why, he wondered, had Mrs. Bowers demanded that what she called the whole Red Jacket gang take this pointless trip.

Ma could have told him, but didn't, she just held out for since Dan's departure she had been questioning her own judgment, knowing full well that a mule deer was not Lemuel's objective. At the same time it seemed unfair to let him tackle this thing alone. What chance had he, unaided, against a killer like Steve Bowers? Also from what Dan had told her it was unlikely that he would recognise his wastrel cousin. Later, she got panicky, her attitude was such that the others could not refuse, and when young Harper was diffident that settled for all time any question about him and Mary. "I'll come if you say so, Mrs. Bowers," then, remembering a day when he stood dripping on the bank of the Fraser at Yale, he laughed, adding, "I wouldn't be here now if it weren't for you."

Three in the afternoon when they reached the point where a tributary of Poorman's Creek crossed the Road: followed a two hour wait during which Ma's anxiety turned to fear, and Mary kept looking at her with unspoken reproach. The sun dipped, shadows lengthened, folks passed up and down. Burdened back-packers toiled north, arms swinging, spines in a stiff curve: others heading south, walking light. The inward bound would talk, joke, ask questions, but the other lot said little. The newcomers would send the defeated ones odd glances, evolving a thousand reasons for these failures all of which they themselves would certainly avoid, then push on, but perhaps secretly not quite so confident.

Cataline came up wearing the stiff white shirt he had donned at Yale; he'd make Barkerville on the twentieth day, and said the Road would be open for bull teams in a month anyway.

When the tinkle of his bell mare died out, Mary broke loose.

"Something's happened, Ma, I know it has. It's all your fault too—you sent them off."

"Why, daughter, they were tickled to go."

"Have you got to fix everything for everybody, always? Can't you ever let other people alone?"

Mrs. Bowers winced: she'd been in a sort of exaltation when she sent those two off, but her heart was now deeply troubled, and Mary's eyes hard to meet.

"It's all right," she answered gently. "they'll be along any time. Dan was mighty pleased to get away from that old gravel heap, but didn't like to quit all on his own, and we do need that meat." Then, turning to Mr. Knott for comfort, "What do you think, Johnny? We've been here quite a while now."

"I quit thinking years ago, ma'am—quit worrying too."

"Sure we're on the right creek, Oliver?"

"Yes, dis de creek," Oliver crooked an arm round

Cariboo Road

Barnee's ragged neck, "after she strike dis road she turn off maybe two tree arpents over dere. I only been up myself one time wid fellers dat look for gold, but dere ain't none—just plenty mule deer lak she was wan beeg stable-yard. Pretty rough countree too."

"Can't we walk over a piece?"

"I ain't never see you travel de bush."

"Johnny, for heaven's sake say something. What about it?"

Mr. Knott deliberated. It was nothing new when men got lost in the Cariboo; it might be so now, and he was contemplating going back to Barkerville for a posse to start a hunt, and at that moment came the sound of a gunshot, very clear, about a mile distant.

"Get that?" he grinned, "they're a bit late, that's all. Better stay where we are."

It was Mrs. Bowers' answer to prayer; she felt a lot better, smiled at Mary who smiled back; then they settled down for another half hour.

"Shouldn't we have signalled too, Johnny?"

"I guess not, likely they're after the deer."

"That's right—it's wounded," chimed in Harper.

"I was kind of scared a while ago," admitted Ma.

Johnny said no more: now he too was puzzled and getting a little scared. Something of this communicated itself to Ma who sat squeezing her fingers tight; her face looked pinched, her eyes tired.

"I can't stand this any longer—perhaps somebody got hurt that time. Mr. Sing, what about it?"

"I guess maybe go see—evellybody go."

"Not me." objected Oliver, "or else dis horse she get stole, and what's dat now! Oh! what's dat!"

It reached them softly, a sort of mellowed concussion, then a washing, rattling sound that smoothed out as though nearby the earth had shrugged, shaken free of something, then settled again.

"That's queer," rasped Johnny, "darn queer—about the same place too. Them fellers didn't take any blasting powder, did they?"

"No, Johnny, why should they?"

"Any prospecting going on about here?" asked Harper.

"No," said Oliver, "dis countree no good; she's all raked over two year ago."

"Velly funny," bleated Mr. Sing, "nobody plospecting but somebody shoot big shot all same place we plomise meet fliends. Maybe big shot catchum somebody. Sing go see."

"We're all going," exploded Ma, "come on, daughter."

Mr. Sing in spite of his bulk travelled like an eager hound, and Johnny was hard to follow. Harper had raced ahead. The bush was a tangle, and soon the two women dropped behind. When they caught up, the three men were standing over a dead mule deer.

"Where are they, Harry?" gasped Mary.

"We don't know—we haven't found them. That's the shot we heard."

"That dust!" panted Ma, "look at all that dust! What makes it?"

Plunging ahead she stood gazing at a river of gravel two hundred feet wide; the wreckage of a cabin littered its surface. Midway across sprawled three inert, half-buried bodies; poles, splintered upended planks, guns, axes, blankets were there. Overhead circled two ragged-winged ravens.

"Hell's broke loose here," breathed Johnny, "that slide started with the blast we heard."

"Those two!" she whispered, "where are they? God help us now. Harry, do something quick! Oh, Mr. Sing! where are they?"

Sing seemed more puzzled than alarmed, but the Oriental eyes were busy. Johnny was hunting about with commendable calm having seen so many dead in the past, though not quite like this. What struck him was the

Cariboo Road

picture as a whole: he'd never forget it, and imagined himself rehearsing the thing to a fascinated audience—"yes, sir," he'd say, "we were sitting I guess not a mile away when—" then he fetched up short—"First let's see who's here—no—I ain't acquainted with either of these parties." He peered into the still faces, and turning, tugged at a protruding leg, whereat the third body drew clear exposing a battered visage about which still clung a shred of black cloth

"Judas Priest! danged if it ain't Michael Trupp!"

The name was electrical; they stood staring at those mysterious features; the mouth, a little open, showed even, white teeth, the thin lips held a frozen curve of fear.

"That," whispered Mary, "is Mr. Hollis—James Hollis; once he stopped at our place for a drink. I saw him afterwards in the post office."

As in a trance Mrs. Bowers watched the girl looking into the disfigured countenance of her own father; and it was true—the thing she herself had feared and fought and hidden, and Mary need never know that fate had intervened to execute an old Ohio warrant, and this was the offering of Lemuel Flint.

"That fixum Mistuh Tlupp," bleated Sing, then—his eyes roving, "velly funny thing I see thlee men but five lifles—" He lifted one—"Mine—Sing lent it Mistah Flint—he shoot velly well."

"By Gorry, partner, you're right," noted Johnny.

Mrs. Bowers picked up another gun. "This is Dan's! Oh, Johnny, where are they? Where—where?"

"We'll find them, Mrs. Bowers, we'll find them," Harper was wandering about on the sea of gravel, "they probably dropped everything and ran for it when the slide started. That's right, eh, Johnny?"

"Sure!" agreed the old man, but he was sore at heart. Could you dig anyone out of a slide like this still living?—He knew you couldn't: he glanced uncertainly at Sing who was now moving about in an odd fashion, quartering the

ground like a dog pursuing an elusive scent; he stooped, walking in diminishing circles; then he halted, bending low, his head on one side; there was something so mysterious in his actions that the others, of whom he seemed unconscious, watched in a kind of helpless uncertainty.

"Velly funny," he said, "but Sing get velly little small noise. Missy, you catchum?"

Mary ran to him: she too bent low; then stretched out, put her ear to the earth. Presently it came—tap-tap—the ghost of a noise. Not daring to move lest she lose it, she gazed up at the big Chinaman whose eyes were now fixed on the upper bench whence the slide had started.

"Yes—yes—I hear it! Mother—Harry—come quick!"

In a moment they too heard it from the solid profundity beneath.

"Somebody bellied alive," said Sing calmly, "all same like somebody hit piecee wood with piecee lock. You stay—wait! Sing go Blakaville quick get plenty help."

"You go, Harry," pleaded Ma, "don't leave us now Mr. Sing, we'll start digging."

"No—velly silly—glavel all slide back—Sing go catchum plenty men."

Like a gale he went, leaving the women dazed, plumped on the spot when the sound seemed to come; they might be sitting on a grave but for that faint signal beneath, and when Johnny picked up a rifle and began to fire periodically it was like a minute gun over the dead. Harper had lit a fire, and was hunting about like a ghoul in the half light.

Mrs. Bowers was near the breaking point: she had worked so hard to make a success in the Cariboo, and this was what it came to with the only man she'd ever loved gasping for breath down—how far down? She'd done it, never again would she see him alive, and her brain went drifting with no anchorage. The Cariboo had beaten her like many another, so she and Mary would go back to Telegraph Hill and the Clancys.

Cariboo Road

Then of a sudden Mary clung desperately, and sobbed:—

“Oh, I can’t stand it—I can’t stand it: I’ve been caring for Mr. Flint for months—you didn’t know—he didn’t either. He’s different from Harry. I didn’t know he felt that way too till one time I caught him looking at me. I didn’t think a man could treat a girl the way he does me. I’d be so happy with him. It doesn’t matter what he was—it’s what he is now. Why did we ever come to this terrible country!”

All Ma could do was to pray—just pray.

“Oh, God I’ve made a heap of mistakes since we left home, and this is the worst, but you know, God, I meant well every time. I was just aiming to do all I could for the family, so forgive me, and it won’t ever happen again, and give me another chance, and save Dan and Mr. Flint because we need them so badly, and—” here she yielded to a shiver—“Thy will be done.”

More of what took place that night is told by various people in various ways. Oliver maintains that he heard in the bush a rending sound as of some animal travelling at high speed, then Sing burst out, unhooked Barnee’s traces, leaped on his back and set off breakneck up the Road.

The Duke says there was a full house in the dance hall of the new Hotel de France, all going as usual, when Sing tore in half-naked, breathless with his story—that the effect was instantaneous, dancing stopped, a ring formed, and the startling news was at first put down to a pipe dream, but this didn’t last more than a minute. Then Billy Barker and Jack Cameron, and Tom Watson and other experienced men hastily got together a bunch of the best diggers available with all that might be needed for sinking a shaft in loose gravel, Cataline rounded up his Indian ponies, and the cavalcade set off. They left Barkerville buzzing like a hive with another bunch starting on foot to see this thing for themselves.

All that Mrs. Bowers knew was that after an endless vigil,

during which underground signals persisted to be answered by gunfire from Harper and Johnny, she heard shouts from the Road and men burst through with lanterns and torches; they took a quick look at the dead ones, and came on to Ma and Mary where they listened to the signals for a minute or so, then said the two must be in some old tunnel, and they'd have the boys out of that in no time. Some started cutting timber for the square sets needed to hold up the loose stuff and work began, and the women could see how helpless they were without these skilled diggers because the stuff did tend to slide just as Sing had said.

It was a six by four shaft with room for one man at the bottom to swing a shovel: Billy and Jack looked after the timbering, and the gang went at it as never before even on top of a pay streak. They took turns at the bottom filling the buckets, fifteen minutes a shift, and came up sweating, and presently the crowd round the collar was so thick that Sergeant Lindsay was hard put to keep them clear. He said the Judge would be there at any time.

Now the knocking grew more distinct, and for the last few feet—this was twelve from the surface—one could catch a faint shout, muffled as though from the middle of the earth. Ma said it was Dan's voice, but she couldn't be sure, while Mary, whose eyes were large and full of shadows, prayed that Lemuel might call too. But he didn't.

Then a shovel scraped the lagging of the tunnel roof: fortunately this held and a rope was let down with a bight in it, then, with three men hauling, Dan came up with his arm crooked through the bight, and Ma thought she'd die of thankfulness right there. He looked at her and gave a sort of grin. She could just say, "Oh, Dan!" Then he said, "Thanks, boys, go easy with Flint." When Lemuel was hoisted his face was grey; he swayed, and tried to smile, but couldn't till Mary stepped right up and put her arm round him; then he did smile, and everybody cheered, and the four moved slowly towards the place where the

Cariboo Road

slide began. Young Harper stood looking after Mary and Lemuel, gave a shrug, and joined the crowd that went to inspect the bodies of the three bandits. They lingered longest over that of Michael Trupp, not touching anything because Lindsay had warned them to keep their hands off. Quite a few wanted the black mask as a souvenir.

Others cut up the mule deer, and grilled steaks over the fire, others again boiled tea, and a sort of deputation came to the four on the hillside with food and drink like it was a barbecue. Dan found himself hungry, but Lemuel only sipped some tea and said he was certainly mighty obliged to everybody, not having reckoned to see daylight again. He kept looking at Mary, but she hardly spoke. Mrs. Bowers had no words for it all, her sensation being that these two once dead were now alive; indeed it went so far as almost to convince her that it wasn't Steve Bowers who lay a hundred yards away showing his teeth like an ill-tempered dog.

About four in the morning when a streak of pink in the east heralded the dawn, the Judge arrived. He came up, stood staring, then said as though to himself—"Well, James Hollis of Sacramento, we meet again;" lifting the black cloth, he laid it back. Johnny, who was right there, heard this.

"That's correct, Judge: it's Jim Hollis for sure, also Michael Trupp."

"How do you know it's Jim Hollis?" asked the Judge like he was addressing the witness box. "Ever seen this man before—if so when and where?"

"No, sir, I never set eyes on him as I know of, but Miss Mary said so."

The Judge looked at him pretty hard for a minute.

"Sure of this, Johnny, quite sure?"

"Why certainly; you go an' ask her yourself."

The Judge hesitated just a second, took another hard stare, then walked up to where the four were sitting, shook

hands all round, congratulated Lemuel and Dan on their escape from death which, from what he had already heard they owed to Sing. Dan said that was right, and they couldn't have lasted much longer because the tunnel had begun to cave in. "What tunnel?" asked the Judge, and got their end of the story. While he listened he lifted his brows at Mrs. Bowers, then glanced at Mary. Ma smiled and nodded, signalling that all was right there. Then he said that under the circumstances he had decided to hold the inquest at once. When they got back to Richfield he'd want a signed statement from Lemuel and Dan, but meantime he'd been told that Mary could identify one of the men, so would she mind doing so.

Mary agreed, so they went down to the crowd. Here the Judge lifted the torn black cloth once more, and had the sergeant get ready with his note book. Ma saw that Dan was staring, screwing up his face as though trying to remember something.

"Miss Bowers," began the Judge, "I understand that you can identify this man?"

"Yes, sir, I can."

"To the best of your knowledge who is he?"

"A Mr. Hollis—Mr. James Hollis; he came to our place last year and gave that name and got a drink. Afterwards I saw him in the post office when Mr. Harper was with me: Harry, you can—"

"Thank you, that will do. Mr. Harper?"

"Yes, sir."

"Do you confirm this?"

"I do, sir: I remember the man asked for a letter; there wasn't any, and he got so persistent that George said if he wanted one as badly as that he'd write one himself."

This brought a laugh, but the Judge didn't smile.

"Thank you, that'll do." Then his eyes seemed to pass right over Lemuel who stood in cold fear of what would happen next. But nothing happened, and that part of the

Cariboo Road

proceedings ended, and the four went back to the hillside each with their secret thoughts.

Now Sergeant Lindsay searched the pockets of the three, putting the contents into different packages, and started some men digging the first three graves on Poorman's Creek. The Judge asked Johnny to knock together something to set on top, nothing tasty, but enough to show that they were graves: on one board he could put *Michael Trupp alias James Hollis died by the hand of God*, on the others no names—just that they wound up in the same way.

Mrs. Bowers watched this going on and was so happy that she couldn't believe it, and smiled at Lemuel and Mary as she sat gripping Dan's arm—grateful to the Judge and Sing and everybody else that the shadow of Steve Bowers had passed forever.

"Well, mother," said Dan, "I'll tell you the rest some-day, the part you don't know yet. My brain's kind of thick, and we couldn't have lasted much longer. Now that's over, what next?"

"Why, Dan, you know—cattle raising."

"How much money have we?"

"About five hundred—we can make it do."

"It ain't much. I guess half that reward for Michael Trupp is coming our way, but I'd sooner not touch it. First thing when I stood at the mouth of the tunnel and him opposite I said, 'By God! those are Steve's shoulders—just about his height too—but I didn't get anything from the shoulders up. Just now, looking at him again, I feel the same way, but can't be sure.'"

"Dan, you're crazy. Think I wouldn't know if that was him?"

"Yes, I guess you saw more of him than I did."

"I should say so. Now are you putting that nonsense out of your head?"

He gave a deep, gusty sigh, more satisfying than any words. "You're right, mother, you're right," then after a

little silence, "just the same it's blood money for a crook—not the kind I figured on taking out of the Cariboo."

Protest was on her lips when in a flash she saw that he was right, far more so than he must ever know: she couldn't let him take it—ever, or conscience would always scourge. They needed it badly, but there must be some other way out. Glancing at Lemuel she saw that he was obviously luxuriating in the nearness of Mary, and that, she reckoned, would be enough reward for him. And Lemuel knew!

"Well, husband," she said gently, "if that's the way you feel, I'm not for persuading you against it."

"That's right too—just supposing it was Steve after all?"

"Forget it."

He nodded, leaning back on the ledge: Harry came up and told them that Cataline was bringing Indian ponies up from the road so that Ma and Mary could ride out. He looked over at the other two and smiled, and Mrs. Bowers liked him for that.

Dan said nothing; reaction was coming over him; unlike Lemuel he had nothing to assuage the greyness of his thoughts. The Cariboo had beaten him like many another, and he remembered something the Judge had said one night when they were camping on the Fraser Canyon about nature leaving her shelves bare where one had a right to expect to find them loaded, and loaded where by all the rules they should be empty. Later, when he was outside, he'd hear of new Eldorados that might have come his way had he stuck to it. That would go hard, and he was about to speak of it when he saw in Ma's face an expression he had not known before.

She was gazing into middle space, seeming a million miles away and in communication with something recognisable only by herself: she was not downcast, but very wistful, and surrounded by an intangible barrier that he hesitated to approach. She might have been questioning herself in a way that had nothing to do with others—just

Cariboo Road

herself, about what she could do here and now to brighten the situation—might have been parading her own reserves to meet whatever might lie ahead.

This abstraction was so intense, so detached, in a way so poignant, she looked in that moment so utterly alone, that irresistibly Dan's mind was forced away from himself into another channel, and he now saw this woman perhaps more clearly than ever before in his life; brave, uncomplaining, steadfast, smiling when the bitter outweighed the sweet as so often it had, with a faith that no misfortune could shake. From Ohio in a covered wagon to the Pacific—from Telegraph Hill to Richfield—now from Upper Williams to Williams Lake! And who was he, just escaped from death by her intuition, to question the future with a partner like this beside him?

"Mother," he stammered, "don't look like that."

"I'm all right, Dan; what is it?"

"Can't tell you now—will some day—but—" he dug one hand into the earth, brought out a fistful, squeezing, fingering the loose grit while a molten disc cut the horizon and another day broadened over the Cariboo.

"What's that in your hand?" squeaked Ma, "Oh, Dan! what is it?"

He looked, gaped, his heart stopped. Gold was in his hand—gold like buckwheat! Taking life from the level rays, it left him bewildered, and he turned, slowly, as in fear of turning, glaring at the raw face of the ledge.

There, exposed, was an eighteen inch seam of black sand, cows' tongues and fine gravel with gold sown royally like buckwheat through the mass. Far above Poorman's Creek they had been leaning against a golden throne.

Dan gave one wild yell, leaped to his feet, began to wave his arms like a lunatic.

20

The Rebirth of Lemuel Flint

SOME weeks later, Begbie laid aside his pen to review the report he was sending to Governor Douglas in Victoria.

"With regard to the recent discovery on Poorman's (see sketch map herewith) the strange circumstances of which I detailed in my last letter, these new diggings have proved to run up to fifty dollars a pan. They present a most important development, and should have considerable influence on the future of the district. It is remarkable that the hiding place of the outlaws should have been so close to this rich deposit, which was only revealed by their cruel attempt to entomb their victims. The existence of the old tunnel from which Bowers and Flint were rescued proves that diggers had been testing the area without success some two years ago.

Heretofore all discoveries have been made either in the beds of existing creeks, or, still lower, on ancient bed-rock which may, as is the case on Lower Williams, lie as deep as sixty feet beneath the present surface. The real significance of the Poorman's find is that its location is high above the creek to-day, proving not only that some geological upheaval of times past had lifted it to its present level, but also that similar occurrences of what are called 'high bench diggings' may be found elsewhere in the gold bearing area."

He had got thus far when Flattery came in. "Good morning, Judge; do I interrupt?"

"Yes, and I'm glad of it. Sit down," he lit his pipe, forgot about the report, "what's new in the twin towns?"

"Nothing notable, but I'm wondering if we can't expand

Cariboo Road

our new hospital. Population is up, with the usual consequences. I've several cases now with no suitable place for them."

"H'm! How much money do you need?"

"Three or four thousand would do it. What about another public subscription?"

"Hardly called for, I think. Matter of fact I had two visitors last evening, and we discussed the same subject." He opened a drawer, took out two bank cheques, fingered them thoughtfully. "The visitors were Bowers and Flint."

"Our new plutocrats!"

"Exactly—plutocrats. They acted up to it, and made a proposition as surprising as it was welcome. It concerned your hospital. They stated that neither of them desired to accept the Trupp reward—they had been notified it was coming their way."

"There's a remarkable situation. What's behind it?"

"They were not communicative in the matter, so I did not press them. When your hospital was suggested as a worthy object they agreed at once and endorsed their cheques. Here you are."

"By Jupiter, Begbie, there's a good act all round. Of course they're rich men, both of 'em, but at the same time—well—?"

Seeing from the Judge's expression that nothing further was to be vouchsafed, he put the cheques in his pocket, then—

"That Poorman's discovery is a big thing, isn't it?"

"Undoubtedly—and there's something more. Flattery, I now firmly believe in the existence of some motherlodes, or lode, nearby in this region. They must be the source of all this widely scattered wealth. Nothing else can explain it, and the metal comes from their weathering and disintegration in ages past."

"But wouldn't such a lode, presuming there is one, be too costly to be worked?"

"At present, yes; in the future, no: good transport, cheaper labour, stamp mills like those in Nevada and California—there's the answer."

"Perhaps you're right: it would mean a different Cariboo," said Flattery thoughtfully.

"And a different type of population. Doesn't it strike you that now we are watching a crowd of great bearded children of fortune all playing a sort of Olympian game with unexampled gusto?"

"That's about it," laughed Flattery. "Go on, Begbie; I like to hear you talk in this mood. What comes next?"

"I look forward to days when the Cariboo will be producing not only gold but food for generations to come."

"By which time you and I will be looking on from elsewhere."

"No, we'll live to see the beginning of it anyway."

Flattery got up. "My thanks for the most satisfactory visit I've paid in a long time. Do I acknowledge these cheques? I mean to the benefactors?"

"I think not—just let it stand; I've already thanked them."

"I see," said the doctor—not seeing at all; but with the hospital extension in his pocket what did that matter? "Nothing further materialised with regard to the late Michael Trupp?"

"Whatever there might be is buried with him," said the Judge quietly. "Morning, Flattery."

Once more alone he resolved into thought, the doctor's question having brought up a point that of late had often presented itself. Was he in all ways doing the very best for the bearded children and the country in his charge? Others by the thousand could have answered that for him, but so deep was the sense of duty animating the man that this was not enough, and in one particular matter he would have liked to feel more content with his action—or lack of action.

Was he, magistrate of the High Court of the Crown

Colony of British Columbia, justified in ignoring misleading information given by one Lemuel Flint, justified in the extempore epitaph over the grave of *James Hollis alias Michael Trupp*?

For some moments he considered this, then in his own direct fashion decided to take soundings with those most intimately concerned. Some assurance might be found there.

On the way to the Bowers' cabin he dropped in for a word with Mr. Knott.

"Come right in, Judge, sit down—glad to see you."

"How are you, Johnny?"

"Pretty spry for me—no—I ain't."

"What's the matter?"

"The calendar, I guess; been dodging it quite a while now, but it's sort of ketchin' up on me. Maybe I've bin overworking a bit; mortality's so darn high these days." He took out a plug of tobacco, glanced at it regretfully, put it back. "Losin' my taste in things too. Judge, what I want right now is a partner."

"With none in sight?"

"Nary a one. All these folks is crazy excep' you an' me an' Mrs. Bowers. Been out at Poorman's this week?"

"No, I haven't had time."

"Well, sir, that gulch is certainly wide open. Hear about young Harper? Sold his claim yesterday—that's number three above discovery—an' starting back for the old country."

"I think perhaps he's right."

"Quite a change for Dan from the Red Jacket too; he's layin' plans for work after the freeze-up."

"But how about yourself, Johnny?" The judge noted the old man's unaccustomed air of weariness, the added stoop in the long, lean back, while the china-blue eyes lacked their former sparkle.

"Me? I don't know—I guess that don't matter much. Say, Judge, step inside a minute."

Begbie followed: in a corner stood the cedar casket on its trestles: Johnny lifted the hinged lid; the interior was not as well stocked as formerly, and on the blue head cushion rested a slip of paper.

"All ready and waiting—remember?"

"*Good friend for Jesus' sake forbear—*" read the Judge. Nodding, he replaced it. "Johnny, why don't you sell out, then get out?"

"Nope: where'd I get to if I did? I'm solus, Judge, so darn solus it just ain't important. What's more I don't want any new friends; fact is I'm pretty near wore out with them I have right now. Say, don't you often kind of survey the human procession and wonder where it's heading, and why?"

This so exactly matched what Begbie often did wonder that the glance he gave the old man was a little startled.

"Yes, I do; it's a sign of advancing years, but don't let that worry you—there isn't any answer, also there's no reason you should stick on here. Victoria's the place—try it."

"No, I guess not: one procession's pretty much like the next. I'm staying put, so if you hear of some party that's hankering for my kind of trade, I'll break him in before—well—I guess you understand. Solong Judge, an' thanks for the visit. That big nugget goes to Mrs. Bowers."

Begbie put out his hand, an unusual gesture. Johnny took it. They both understood.

Mrs. Bowers was in a rocker outside the cabin when he came up, and she made him very welcome.

"It's a good thing to see you resting for a change," he smiled.

"Resting, Judge! there's so much to do I was trying to figure what to tackle first."

"Yes, I expect so. How's the family?"

"Pretty pert, sir, all of 'em. Dan's out on the claims—got ten men clearing off some top stuff—he'll be back Saturday."

"So Johnny told me. And the partner?"

"Sitting somewhere's off in the shade with daughter," said Ma, eyes twinkling. "When you reflect how things turn out—well—"

"Yes, I know, and the whole camp is well content—I hear that on all sides."

"Folks are certainly kind," she admitted, "but I'm not used to it yet. Don't suppose I ever will be. Why only yesterday Dan told me he'd had an offer of fifty thousand for a half interest in any one of our three claims. Sounds to me like a fairy tale."

"In one way, but not another. What's he doing about it?"

"I don't know, yet; he asked me, and I said I wasn't handing out any more advice to anyone. Wouldn't be surprised if he took it and put the money into cattle raising just as you said, and built a nice home to start with. It'd be a treat to have a real home with all the fixings."

"This country will welcome you, Mrs. Bowers."

"Well, sir, the country's certainly done the square thing by us; maybe we had to go through the mill before it happened, but, as I said, I don't get it yet. Now—" she made a gesture—"take those two over there: if anyone had told me that Mr. Flint—I'm just learning to call him Lemuel, but he's so darn dignified it comes hard—was slated to join our family, I—well—what do you think about it?"

"A year ago, I would have said 'no'; to-day to my mind he is quite a different man, but please don't be influenced by me in the matter."

"There's a lot that's hard to put into so many words," said she reflectively.

"In this case I quite agree."

"At the same time least said soonest mended," then, as though to herself, she added, "you see Mr. Flint knew."

"Knew what?" he asked quietly, though needing no telling.

"Well, Judge, now it's all over there's no sense in hiding it up." Then with the ingenuous look of a child she recounted her visit to Lemuel in the Hotel de France after he had been stabbed. This, though news to Begbie, confirmed what he himself had suspected, and went far to dispose of the question that of late had been somewhat disconcerting. Now quite clearly he saw the ex-gambler as one who for the sake of another had climbed out of the pit of humiliation and played the most perilous game of his life.

"And so," concluded Ma, "when Steve was buried as Michael Trupp, and you let it go at that, I saw right away you had jumped at the truth. Judge, you certainly cleared the way for better things that time."

For this he felt grateful; it was just the touch he needed, and, after all, what more could any man in his position do in a country like the Cariboo. Then, since anything further on the subject was needless, he said:—

"I'm going on to Lower Williams. The young couple are down that way?"

"Sure—you'll see them."

"If I do I won't intrude," he smiled.

As it happened he didn't see them, or they him; they had retreated to a less public spot, and were sitting close, Lemuel twirling his wide-brimmed hat and doing most of the talking, with Mary content—for the present—that this should be so. Traversing such new ground, he picked his way with care, still incredulous about his own good fortune.

"You see, Miss Mary, I—"

"Why 'miss'?" she laughed.

"Habit I guess, but I'll get over it: there's such a heap of things in range right now it's kind of stupefying—if you follow me."

"I'll try," she said demurely, "what sort of things?"

"Well, for one Dan's trying to talk me into a partnership in a cattle ranch down round Williams Lake. You fond of steers?"

Mary pushed out her lower lip in a way she had, and looked mutinous.

"I just hate the sight of them."

"I ain't partial to 'em myself, so steers are out." He put his long fingers tip to tip, then— "like to live down in Victoria?"

"I don't know yet, Lemuel; it's too soon to decide."

"Yes, maybe," then because she was silent so long watching the moiling expanse of Lower Williams where men swarmed like ants, he murmured, "your lead, partner," hastily adding "I'd certainly appreciate being put wise."

Mary laughed at him. "What do you think?"

"It's all the same to me, and expense don't count; if you don't hanker for Victoria there's the rest of the world. We've got to have some kind of celebration as I see it. Dan's going to be right on the claims, so he'll look after my end of things."

"Could we have a little trip to Chicago?" said she wistfully. "I've never been north of Ohio."

"There's certainly one wide open town," he nodded with reminiscences of Chicago that would be kept strictly to himself, "but we can do a sight better: we could take a boat from Victoria to the Isthmus, then across to the old country."

"But—but I thought you didn't like Britishers, and it's an awfully long way."

"The same is true from what I've seen of 'em here, but they might be different at home: then we could slide across and have a look at the Frenchies. Humanity's what interests me—always did, and—"

"Lemuel—Lemuel—stop!"

"Why what's the matter?" he looked a little injured, "sounds all right to me, and certainly the expense don't—"

It sounded all right to her also, but far too wonderful,

and she regarded him with a sort of amused affection. With that tall, lean figure, those dark contemplative eyes, that air of poise and natural courtesy, here was a man with whom she would be proud to be seen anywhere; she could picture themselves in far countries, and people turning to ask who the distinguished stranger might be. It might come in the distant future, but now there were other and more important things, and certainly she must know this man of hers better than she did to-day.

"You think I'm hard to please, don't you?"

"Why no; trouble is you're too easy. What's in your mind?"

"Then I think what you do with yourself is more important than what we do with the money, and we do owe this country something."

This was undeniable, but his response not what she anticipated.

"Meaning I owe something to the—the party that started that slide?"

"No! don't speak of that—ever, but, Lemuel, I want you to work your own claim in the summer; don't leave it all to others. I want to see you taking your own gold out of your own paystreak. Things will taste better for both of us if you do that. What with getting in and getting out it will take a good part of the year. If you'll do that, I'll do whatever you want in the winter. That's fair. Harry's sold his claim—he's quitting, but you mustn't quit. Later on there's a lot we'll do together, but not yet."

This being the longest announcement she had ever made in her life, she paused to note the effect: Lemuel had not stirred; his head was a little on one side, his eyes half closed, and he gazed at her with a curious expression.

During the past moment it had dawned on Mr. Flint that this girl of his choice had certain similarities not heretofore observed, with the woman she believed to be her mother, and what she had just said might well have been

the dictum of Mrs. Bowers: it comprised the same directness and common sense, a combination he was quick to perceive. Always from the first he had for Mrs. Bowers a mixture of admiration tinged with a touch of timidity because whatever Mrs. Bowers decided—went. Now in the virginal and so desirable creature beside him was there not a corresponding quality acquired by long association with the real head of the Bowers family?

Then flashed another thought, far more illuminating. This damsel with her expressive eyes and full rich lips, with her bloom and youth, her readiness to love and be loved, was she not daughter to the party who had recently done his best to remove Messrs. Bowers and Flint from public notice for all time, and was not this party a man of notable decision and determination? Yes, the facts spoke for themselves, and thence without doubt had the prospective bride drawn the characteristics that punched so many holes in his own expansive ideas of a wedding journey. It was not the result of association.

This, however, made no difference; he was too deeply in love, and just didn't care. He had sworn—and would keep the oath—never to touch cards again; he would be with nice people—would himself become a nice person, and behind him Mary and the paystreak on Poorman's Creek.

Then too in the past he had been unconsciously lonely; he could see it now, and this moment when the shape of his future was being settled the prospect caused him no dismay, and his mind darted back to a day on the *Brother Jonathan* when first he set eyes on Miss Mary Bowers. He felt the same way now, and though he saw himself in the future doing pretty much what he was told to do—doing as Dan did—the prospect was surprisingly attractive.

All this moved in him much as an invisible eddy stirs in a quiet river without reaching the unrippled surface.

"Well, Mary, you've certainly got things worked out. When did you start in?"

The Rebirth of Lemuel Flint

"Oh, Lemuel, don't you like the idea? I've thought such a lot about it."

"What you say goes with me. You fond of poetry, girly?"

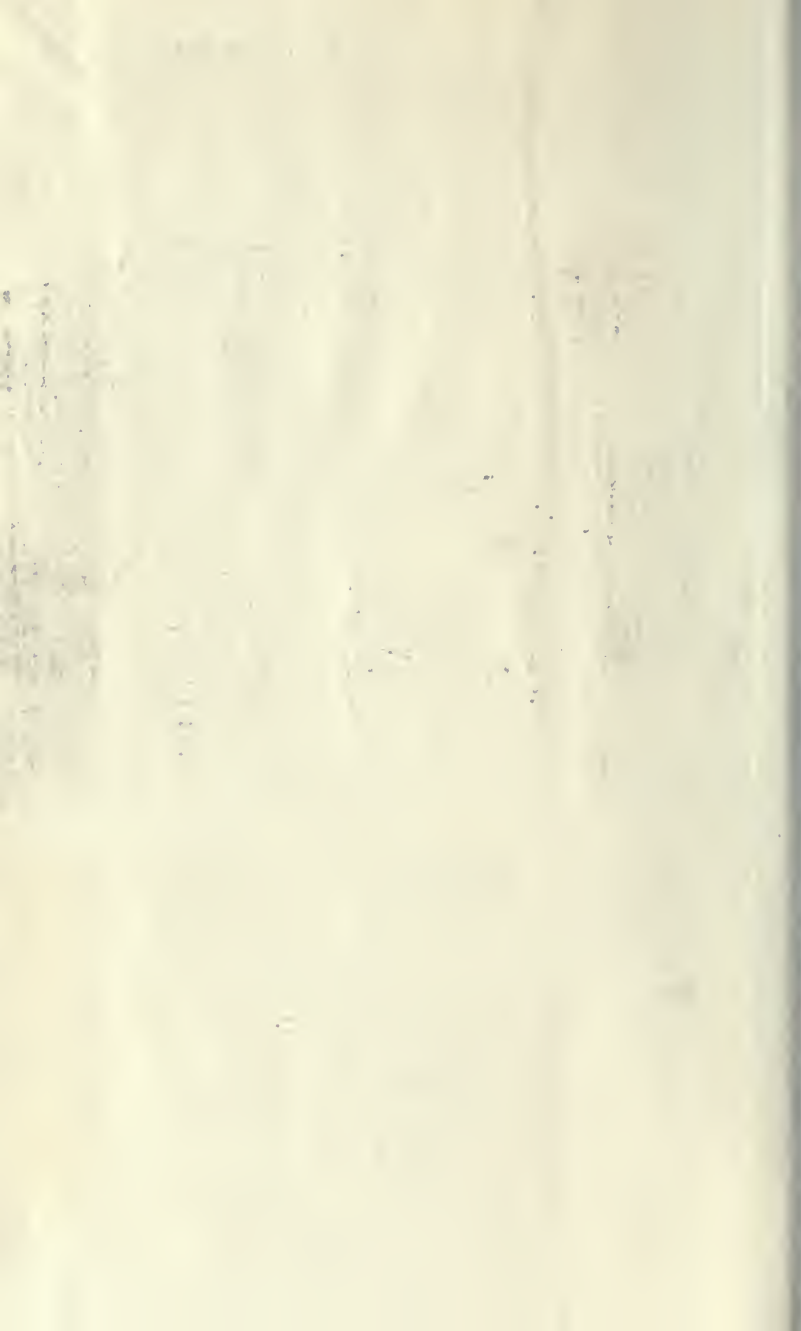
"I haven't read much, but I'm going to. You know a lot, don't you?"

"Some, Mary, some; right now I'm thinking of a poem Mr. Tom Moore wrote—Irish born—passed in his checks about ten years ago."

"Can you remember it, Lemuel?"

"Why certainly: he took her hand, pressing it, gazing into her eyes with a frank devotion that moved her deeply:—

'The heart that has truly loved never forgets,
But as truly loves on to the close;
As the sunflower turns on her god when he sets
The same look that she turned when he rose'."



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